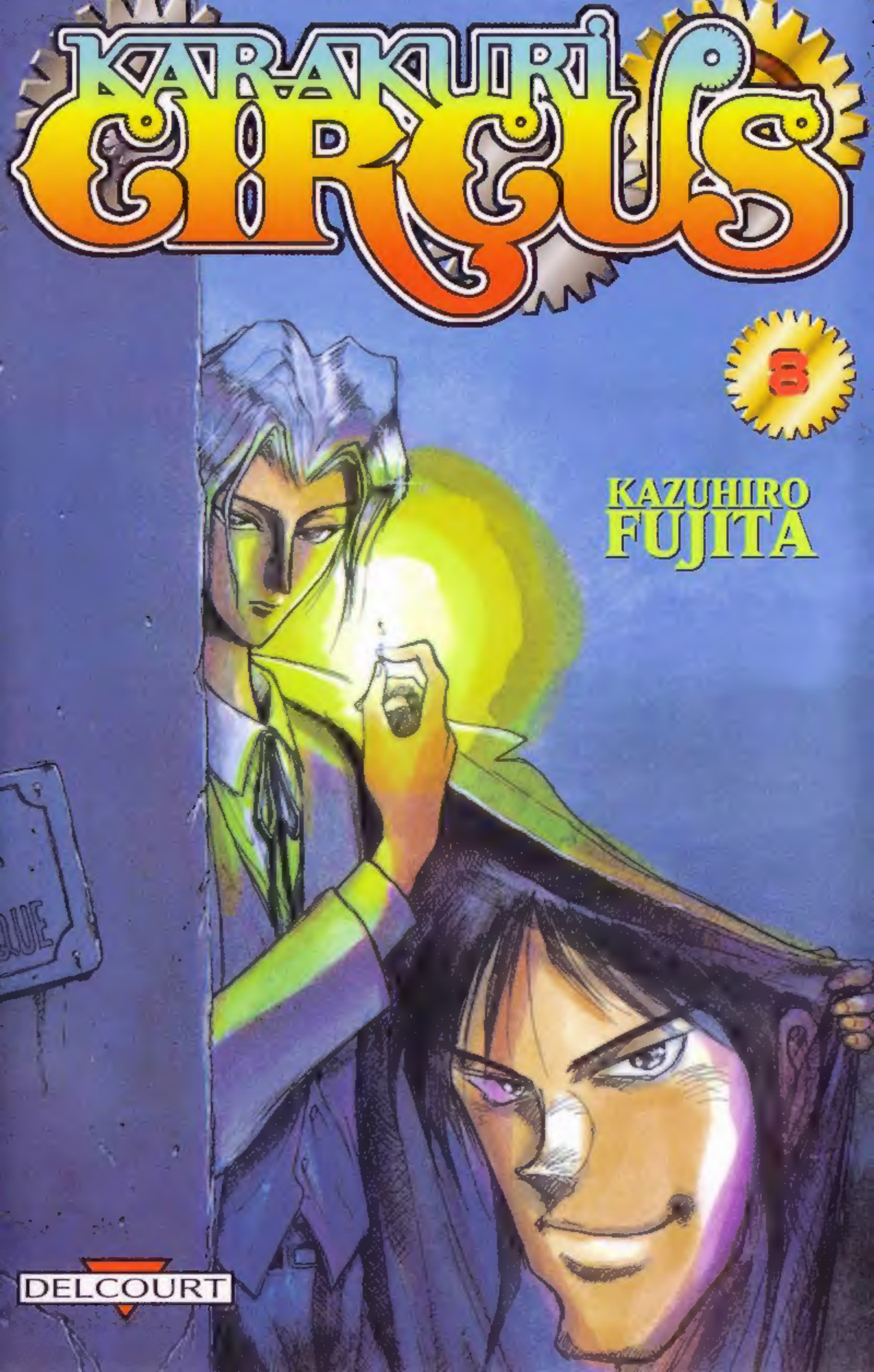
BLACKOUT

KARAKURI CIRCUS

8

KAZUHIRO FUJITA



DELCOURT

KARAKURI CIRCUS

8

DE

KAZUHIRO FUJITA

★ SUMMARY OF THE PREVIOUS VOLUMES ★

MASARU SAIGA AND SHIROGANE CONTINUE THEIR JOURNEY IN ORDER TO AVOID ANY CONFLICT WITH THE SAIGA FAMILY WHO'S STILL TRYING TO GET THE MONEY MASARU INHERITED. MEANWHILE, MASARU TOOK PART IN THE NAKAMACHI CIRCUS STREET SHOW, WHICH WAS PERFORMED WITHOUT MARQUEE AND WITH ALMOST NO EQUIPMENT. MOREOVER, THE NAKAMACHI HAD TO COPE WITH ALL THE TRAPS SET BY THE MITSU'USHI DURING THEIR SHOW. FORTUNATELY, MASARU'S INGENUITY PREVAILED AND THEIR PERFORMANCE WAS A BIG SUCCESS. THE NAKAMACHI COULD THEN MOVE FORWARD AND HOPE FOR THE RESURRECTION OF THEIR CIRCUS.

NARUMI KATO, WHO HAD SAVED MASARU AT THE KARUIZAWA BATTLE AND HAD THUS GOTTEN BADLY WOUNDED, MIRACULOUSLY CAME BACK TO LIFE. HOWEVER, HE'S NOW IN FRANCE AND SEEMS TO HAVE LOST ALL HIS MEMORIES OF THE PAST EVENTS. GUY, A MAN PRETENDING TO BE A DOCTOR, CLAIMS HE'S THE ONE WHO SAVED NARUMI. IN FACT, HE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO REALLY KNOWS THE TRUTH. GUY BELONGS TO A SECRET ORGANIZATION OF IMMORTALS CALLED "SHIROGANE" WHOSE PURPOSE IS TO FIGHT AGAINST EVIL AUTOMATONS. HE'S NOW ABOUT TO REVEAL THE SECRET OF THE "AQUA VITAE," THE WATER THAT ENABLED HIM TO BRING NARUMI BACK TO LIFE...

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■ KAZUHIRO FUJITA ■

DADA DA DA

Greentown, Illinois - USA

DODO DO DO

ACT VII : KARAKURI * A MAN

"THE AQUA VITAE"

WE'RE STILL TRANFER-RING SIX PEOPLE!

VOOM

...WE'VE COMPLETED THE EVACUA-TION OF BURBERRY STREET IN THE NORTHERN SECTION...

...WHAT?!

YES.

THE INFECTION HASN'T SPARED ANYONE IN GREENTOWN.

TAN TAN TAN

GHH

KILL

GHH

GHH

DAMN!

EVEN THE CHILDREN HAVE BEEN INFECTED ...

I CAN'T FIGURE IT OUT. HOW CAN NINE THOUSAND PEOPLE BE INFECTED IN ONE SINGLE NIGHT...

BY THE SAME DISEASE...?

HOW'S THIS POSSIBLE?!

BUT...

DOCTOR... I'VE BEEN WORKING FOR EIGHT YEARS IN THE BACTERIOLOGY SPECIAL UNIT,

WE'RE DEALING WITH ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME.

IT OCCURS WHEN YOUR VITAL SYSTEMS ACKNOWLEDGE THE SUPERI-ORITY...

...OF THE PARA-SYMPATHIC NERVES OF SOMEONE ELSE.

ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME IS SOMETHING TERRIBLE!

DURING 3 DAYS

6 AMAZING SHOWS

THE MIDNIGHT CIRCUS

FROM FRIDAY TO SUNDAY IN GREENTOWN

CHEAP TICKET FOR KIDS ON SATURDAY EVENING

$6.50

VHHH

MIDNIGHT CIRCUS

FLAP

ACT VII : KARAKURI * A MAN

"THE AQUA VITAE"

VHHH H...

Quiberon - France

NARUMI... HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT ALCHEMY?

HOW IGNORANT !!

HAPPINESS SHOULDN'T SHINE ON SUCH A USELESS, SIMPLE-MINDED MAN!!

HM?!

AL... CHE... NOPE, NEVER HEARD OF IT!

STOP PRETENDING! TELL ME MORE ABOUT THAT THING INSTEAD!

BLOOD!

...I'M VERY SICK!

HEUH

HEUH

WHAT'S UP WITH YOU?!

ONE OF ITS PURPOSES IS TO MAKE PURE GOLD OUT OF SIMPLE METAL!

IT'S AN EMPIRICAL SCIENCE THAT AIMS TO ACHIEVE THE "ULTIMATE TRANSFORMATION."

ALCHEMY'S A SCIENCE OF DARKNESS...

...THAT INVOLVES "TRANSMUTATION" TECHNIQUES.

THE TRUE GOAL OF ALCHEMY IS TO FIND THE "ULTIMATE TRUTH."

PLOC

THAT IS NOT THE SOLE PURPOSE OF ALCHEMY.

HA HA HA! MAKE GOLD OUT OF IRON OR COPPER?! SO IT'S A SCIENCE MADE BY STINGY PEOPLE FOR STINGY PEOPLE!!

BY SHARPENING HIS MIND AND BODY, HE MIGHT ACHIEVE AND UNDERSTAND "TRUTH."

.A MAN CAN ALSO POLISH HIS MIND.

IT IS SAID THAT WHILE TRYING TO OBTAIN THE SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS NEEDED TO CREATE GOLD...

EXPERIMENTS HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT BY GREAT ALCHEMISTS FOR MORE THAN 2000 YEARS! IN THE EAST, IN THE WEST... EVERYWHERE, IN FACT!!

DON'T BE SILLY!! THE ART OF ALCHEMY IS NOTHING RECENT!!

WOOOW! SOUNDS LIKE THE NONSENSE YOU CAN HEAR IN ALL THE SECTS THAT ARE HAVING A LOT OF SUCCESS THESE DAYS!

...AND EVEN THEOLOGY!!

BUT ALCHEMY IS UNIQUE!

...IT'S A TRANSCENDENTAL SCIENCE THAT USES PHYSICS, PHARMACEUTICS, CHEMISTRY, PHILOSOPHY...

NOWADAYS ALCHEMY'S STILL CONSIDERED TO BE A PRIMITIVE AND ECCENTRIC SCIENCE THAT HAS BEEN TRYING TO ACHIEVE THE IMPOSSIBLE

EACH ALCHEMIST HAS MADE THEIR OWN PATH AND DONE THEIR OWN RESEARCH SOME HAVE TRIED TO IMPROVE THEIR EXPERIMENTATION SKILLS IN CHEMISTRY OTHERS HAVE BEEN MORE KEEN ON THE PHILOSOPHIC SIDE OF ALCHEMY

IT'S TRUE THAT SOME ALCHEMISTS ARE CROOKS

BUT THERE ARE OTHERS WHO AREN'T

ALL THAT STUFF SEEMS FISHY I BET

THERE'S SOME KIND OF SWINDLING GOING ON!

THAT COULD HEAL EVERY DISEASE AND GIVE LIFE TO INORGANIC THINGS

AND STILL OTHERS HAVE TRIED TO CREATE A PERFECT ELIXIR

THAT ELIXIR IS... THE AQUA VITAE!

I DIDN'T COME WITH YOU TO HEAR THIS KIND OF FOOLISH NONSENSE, SOME FREAKING TALE CLOSER TO SCIENCE FICTION THAN REALITY!

SCRATCH

FORGIVE ME, GUY... BUT...

SCRATCH SCRATCH

THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I'M TRYING TO TELL YOU, MORON! THERE'S AQUA VITAE FLOWING IN YOUR VEINS!!

...I JUST WANNA KNOW WHY AND HOW I LOST MY ARM!!

BUT, AMID YOUR MISFORTUNE, YOU GOT LUCKY...

BECAUSE YOUR ARM HAD BEEN SLICED AT ITS BASE, VERY CLOSE TO YOUR HEART...

WHEN I FOUND YOU, YOU WERE ON THE VERGE OF DEATH. YOU LOST A LOT OF BLOOD

VHHH...

...

HUH ?!

I MANAGED TO POUR THE AQUA VITAE I HAD LEFT IN YOUR WOUNDED BODY.

I KNEW THAT TIME WAS AGAINST ME. IT WAS A RISKY BET...

...YOU FELL INTO COLD, PURE WATER.

WHILE IN THIS LOW TEMPERATURE, YOUR MUSCLES AND BLOOD VESSELS REMAINED STIFF, WHICH PREVENTED YOU FROM LOSING YOUR BLOOD TOO FAST.

YOU'VE LEARNED MARTIAL ARTS, AND YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE HUMAN BODY'S QUITE THOROUGH... SO, TELL ME: IN THE SHAPE YOU WERE IN, WHAT WERE YOUR CHANCES OF SURVIVAL?

HOW COME YOU'RE STILL ALIVE, THEN?

THAT'S... IMPOS-SIBLE...

AND THAT WEIRD THING SAVED ME?!

...I WAS ALMOST DEAD...

YOU'RE SAYING THAT...

FLOTCH
FLITCH

-- Deuce --

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

TAC

HOP

HAA...

HA... I SEE...

IT'S TRUE THAT I'VE ALWAYS HAD A FEELING THIS ARM WAS A PART OF MY OWN BODY.

...YOUR ARTIFICIAL ARM'S WORKING AS IF IT HAD REAL NERVES.

THANKS TO THE AQUA VITAE, WHICH ENABLES THE CONNECTION WITH YOUR BODY..

...TO CREATE WITH HIS OWN HANDS A BEING THAT WOULD LIVE FOR-EVER.

IN THE 18TH CENTURY, AN ALCHEMIST TRIED...

EMPTY

BUT TODAY, THERE'S NOT EVEN A SINGLE DROP LEFT.

.. FULL OF AQUA VITAE.

THIS WELL USED TO BE...

ONE THAT WOULDN'T GET OLD,

WOULDN'T LOSE IT'S STENGTH,

"A BEING THAT WOULD LIVE FOR-EVER"?

REALLY?

.. IN ORDER TO BRING BEINGS OF THIS KIND TO LIFE.

THE AQUA VITAE WAS CREATED...

WOULD FEEL NO PAIN

OR ANY OTHER FEELING,

AND WOULD NEVER DIE.

WOULD NEVER GET HURT,

THESE CREATURES ARE CALLED... THE "ALITOMATONS."

BUT, GUY... SUCH BEINGS... DON'T EXIST.

YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT "THAT."

HA.. I SEE...

WHHH...

COME WITH ME, NARUMI...

...WHICH WAS LATER CALLED FRANCINE. THIS ALITOMATON BECAME...

WHILE HE WAS GETTING CLOSER TO THE END OF HIS LIFE, THE ALCHEMIST EXPERIMENTED ON THE EFFECTS OF THE AQUA VITAE FOR THE FIRST TIME ON A PUPPET...

...AN ALITHENTIC WOMAN...

.. AS REAL AS YOU AND ME.

CLAC

CLAK

HM?

..HER CREATOR HAD MADE A MISTAKE.

IT WAS SINISTER!

BUT ACTUALLY ...

TAN

SHE WAS ABLE TO THINK AND TALK BY HERSELF,

AND SHE BEHAVED LIKE A LADY.

FRANCINE COULDN'T LAUGH OR EVEN SMILE!

THE AQUA VITAE, AS ULTIMATE AND PERFECT AS IT MIGHT BE, COULDN'T TRANSFORM AN AUTOMATON INTO A HUMAN BEING AS ALIVE AS OTHER HUMANS.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

THEREFORE, FRANCINE STARTED TO THINK...

SHE COULD MIMIC EVERY OTHER FEELING WITH HER FACE, BUT NO SMILE HAD EVER SHINED ON HER LIPS.

"THE OTHERS SHALL DO FUNNY THINGS IN ORDER TO MAKE ME LAUGH."

"AS I CAN'T DO IT BY MYSELF."

"SOMEONE HAS TO MAKE ME LAUGH."

"THAT'S TO SAY AN IMMORTAL BEING."

AND SO HERE'S HER RESEARCH "SOME DAY IF I WERE TO SMILE I'D FINALLY BE THE CREATURE MY MASTER WISHED TO CREATE."

FRANCINE THEN STARTED HER OWN RESEARCH ON ALCHEMY

IN ORDER TO CREATE OTHER BEINGS SUCH AS HERSELF

"SOME ANIMALS TOO."

"OR BRASS BANDS THAT PLAY ENTERTAINING MELODIES."

"CLOWNS FOR AN STABLE."

"SOME ARTISTS WHO MASTERED SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES CAN MAKE MEN LAUGH."

NEVERTHELESS SHE CREATED SOME SPECIAL CORPOREAL FLUIDS WHICH WERE OF LOW-GRADE QUALITY

"TO INSUFFLATE LIFE INTO HER AUTOMATONS"

OF COURSE SHE DIDN'T HAVE ANY MORE OF THE ALMA MATER HER CREATOR USED TO GIVE HER LIFE

BY LEADING A WEIRD CIRCUS ... THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

NO... SHE'S STILL LOOKING FOR A WAY...

AND ... DID FRANCINE MANAGE TO LAUGH WITH THE HELP OF HER AUTOMATONS?

A WAY TO TRANSFORM HERSELF... OR RATHER TO TRANSFORM ALL THE AUTOMATONS INTO REAL HUMANS.

TAN TAN TAN

WHAT'S SHE... ... LOOKING FOR?

YEAH! OKAY, OKAY! I GOT IT!

WEIRD?!... YOU BETTER APOLOGIZE TO MY DEAR OLYMPIA RIGHT NOW!!

GHHHHH

... AND ...

BY USING SOME WEIRD PUPPETS, AREN'T THEY?

...ACCORDING TO WHAT YOU TOLD ME, HUMANS CALLED SHIROGANE ARE SUPPOSED TO DESTROY ALL THE AUTOMATONS...

GLOUPS

GUY, YOU MUST FORGET ABOUT THESE AUTOMATONS!

IF THEY TRIED TO KILL ME THE OTHER DAY, IT'D BE BECAUSE YOU WERE CHASING THEM, RIGHT?

WHO ASSIGNED THAT MISSION TO THE SHIROGANE?

What a strange guy!

...

IT'S HERE.

I DON'T THINK THEY'D BE ABLE TO ATTACK HUMANS...

WE'RE TOO LATE!

I'M GOING TO INTRODUCE YOU TO SOME PEOPLE WHO'LL MAKE THINGS CLEARER ABOUT THAT.

HMM?

YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE ME IF I WERE TO EXPLAIN EVERYTHING MYSELF...

TO

TO

THEY'RE PRETTY MUCH THE TEACHERS OF ALL THE SHIROGANE.

THREE SHIROGANE ...

WHO'S IN THERE?

GUY,
I KIDNAPPED ONE
OF THE OLDIES.
I'LL KILL YOU
IN CARNAC.
FLAVIO

THEY ARE TOO THIRSTY FOR HUMAN BLOOD!

GUY,
I KIDNAPPED O
OF THE OLDI
I'LL KILL YOU
IN CARNAC.
FLAVIO

YOU'RE ASKING ME TO FORGET ABOUT THE AUTOMA-TONS...

...BUT THAT'S IMPOS-SIB-E.

BUT I'M STILL CONSCIOUS! THE SUFFERING I EXPERIENCE IS GUT-WRENCHING...

...GIVES ME UNIMAGINABLE SUFFERING! ALL OF A SUDDEN, MY HEART IS GRIPPED BY THE COLD HAND OF DEATH, AND MY BODY STARTS TO SHIVER...

ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME ...

...SOMEONE GIVES ME A REAL SMILE.

UNTIL...

APPARENTLY, I'D BEEN SAVED WITH SOME "AQUA VITAE," A MIRACULOUS BREW THAT CAN HEAL ALL DISEASES. A PROSTHESIS HAD ALREADY REPLACED MY LOST ARM...

ONE DAY, I LOST ALL OF MY MEMORIES.

I WOKE UP IN FRANCE AND I HAD LOST AN ARM.

WHEN I LIVED IN JAPAN, I FOUGHT EVERY DAY TO LIVE NORMALLY, IN SPITE OF THE DISEASE...

THE NAME'S NARUMI KATO. I'VE GOT THIS WEIRD DISEASE.

...OR AT LEAST I TRIED!

ACT VII: KARAKURI * A MAN "THOSE WHO BECAME SHIROGANES"

HE'S EXTREMELY PRETENTIOUS AND SNOBBISH, BUT ALSO VERY MYSTERIOUS.

THE AQUA VITAE WAS CREATED BY SOME KIND OF SCIENCE I'D NEVER HEARD ABOUT BEFORE CALLED "ALCHEMY." MY SAVIOR'S NAME IS GUY.

..BE-TWEEN GUY...

..AND SOME AUTOMATONS, HUMAN-SIZED PUPPETS THAT CAN ACT AND TALK ON THEIR OWN.

AFTER THAT, I WAS UN-WILLINGLY INVOLVED IN A FIGHT.

WHHH_

HE PROMISED TO ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS THAT I WANTED TO ASK HIM.

GUY BROUGHT ME TO THIS PLACE CALLED QUIBERON, WHERE I CURRENTLY AM.

ACT VII: KARAKURI • A MAN
"THOSE WHO BECAME SHIROGANES"

I STILL DON'T KNOW WHY I'M IN FRANCE AND WHY I LOST AN ARM...

BUT...

...IN THE CURRENT SITUATION, IT'S NOT REALLY TIME TO BE ASKING QUESTIONS ANYMORE.

LADY! ARE YOU ALRIGHT ?!

DAH

HUH ?!

WAKE UP! WE'RE GONNA ...

?!

CURSED AUTOMATONS! THEY CAN EVEN DO THIS NOW...

EEEH!

GHHH!!

SHE LOOKS LIKE... A MUMMY!

SHE'S NOT EVEN BLEED-ING!

WHAT'S WITH THIS BODY?!

MARIE...

WHERE ARE TANIA AND LUCILLE?

I CAN'T SEE... ANYMORE ...

IS THAT YOU .. GUY?

IT'S ALMOST THE END... FOR ME...

I THINK THAT. .

...I CAN FINALLY BID YOU FARE-WELL.

I SEE...

HE BROUGHT HER TO CARNAC... TO SET A TRAP FOR YOU... LUCILLE... FOLLOWED THEM...

TANIA WAS ABDUCTED... BY AN AUTO-MATON... NAMED FLAVIO...

FINALLY ...

...I CAN SAY "ADIEU"

...GUY.

BUT... WHAT ARE YOU BABBLING ABOUT, GUY?!

DON'T WORRY, LADY, I'M GONNA BRING YOU TO A HOSPITAL RIGHT AWAY!

YES ...

EVEN THE AQUA VITAE...

...CANNOT FORCE ME TO PLAY THIS CURSED ROLE OF "SHIROGANE" ANYMORE.

THOSE AUTOMATONS SUCKED OUT ALL OF MY BLOOD... TILL THE LAST DROP.

SHE'S TALKING ABOUT THAT STICKY STUFF THAT LOOKED LIKE MERCURY.

ONLY IF THEY ARE REGULARLY MIXED WITH FRESH HUMAN BLOOD...

I MUST LET YOU KNOW THAT... THE INTERNAL FLUIDS OF AUTOMATONS REMAIN EFFECTIVE ...

I CAN ONLY... HEAR YOUR VOICE... YOU ARE A NEW RECRUIT... ARE YOU NOT?

THEY...

...SUCKED OUT ALL OF YOUR BLOOD?!

WERE NOT PERFECT FOR PRODUCING MANY OTHER AUTOMATONS.

BUT THE VITAL FLUIDS SHE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF THE AQUA VITAE...

THAT PERFECT BREW CREATED BY USING ALCHEMY.

THEIR LEADER, FRANCINE, IS A PUPPET GIVEN LIFE BY THE AQUA VITAE...

AS I ONCE TAUGHT HIM BEFORE.

I CANNOT TEACH YOU ANY MORE THAN THIS.

GUY WILL TEACH YOU... THE REST...

ARE THEY AUTOMATONS OR VAMPIRES?!

THAT'S WHY THEY HAVE TO SUCK HUMAN BLOOD.

200 YEARS BEFORE I COULD DIE...

200 YEARS...

AAAH... IT WAS SO LONG...

GET YOURSELF TOGETHER, LADY! I BEG YOU!

I CAN FINALLY DIE...

...DO NOT REFUSE ME THIS GIFT!

YOU KNOW THERE IS ONE THING I ALWAYS REGRETTED.

FAREWELL ALL OF YOU.

GUY...

WHAT?!

SHE COULDN'T DIE... FOR 200 YEARS?!

. THE AQUA VITAE!

. I SHOULD NEVER HAVE TAKEN.

WHEN I CAUGHT ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME ...

CRAC

RROC

BOOM

GUY!!! ANSWER ME!!!

HAA

HAA

THIS ISN'T HOW... HUMAN BEINGS DIE...

ALSO . DID SHE SAY THAT SHE HAD ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME?!

PLOP

SAH...

YOU'VE FINALLY BEEN FREED...

...FROM THE CHAINS THAT BIND US TO THE AQUA VITAE.

I REALLY ENVY YOU...

AND . I UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY NEEDED HUMAN BLOOD.

APPARENTLY, THIS LADY DIED BECAUSE SHE WAS ATTACKED BY AUTOMA-TONS...

GUY... WHAT DOES THIS A.L MEAN?

...

THIS WOMAN... SHE TALKED ABOUT THAT DISEASE IN A WEIRD WAY! WHY?!

YOU KNOW I HAVE ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME!

YOU, AND THE "SHIRO-GANES!" WHO ARE YOU?!

NARUMI...

... WE, THE SHIROGANES, DESTROYERS OF AUTOMA-TONS...

...ARE ALL AFFECTED BY THAT DISEASE!

JUST AS I WAS, BY THE WAY...

MARIE WAS GREATLY AFFECTED BY IT,

?!

I WAS BORN IN PARIS TO A VERY WEALTHY FAMILY.

BUT I HAVE ONLY A FEW MEMORIES OF IT.

BLOMM

WHAT

I CAN ONLY REMEMBER THE WALLS OF MY HOSPITAL ROOM.

...I CAUGHT ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME WHEN I WAS STILL VERY YOUNG.

IN FACT ...

I THOUGHT ONLY ABOUT ONE THING: HOW TO RELIEVE MY SUFFERING.

I WANTED TO DIE.

I WAS LIVING IN PERPETUAL ANGUISH.

...MARIE PAID ME A VISIT. IT WAS THE VERY FIRST TIME.

ONE DAY, WHEN THE WIND WAS BLOWING VERY STRONGLY, JUST LIKE TODAY...

WHEEE

ALTHOUGH THE REASON FOR IT IS UNKNOWN ...

...THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME CAN TELL WHERE SIMILARLY AFFLICTED PEOPLE ARE.

WHY HAVE YOU COME HERE?

WHO ARE YOU?

WHO...

VHHH

I AM WHAT'S CALLED... A "SHIRO-GANE."

MOMMY! HELP ME!!!

HER EYES LOOK SILVERY!!!

I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU A VERY SIMPLE QUESTION.

WOULD YOU RATHER DIE IN UNBEARABLE PAIN?

OR

DO YOU WANT TO KEEP ON LIVING?

AND EVERY DAY, YOU ARE AFRAID OF EXPERIENCING THE EPISODE THAT WILL TAKE YOUR LIFE

ONE DAY, YOU WILL FINALLY DIE BECAUSE OF YOUR SICK-NESS

HUH?

IF YOU DRINK A BIT OF THIS "AQUA VITAE,"

YOU WILL COMPLETELY BE CURED OF YOUR SICK-NESS.

YES ...

HOWEVER, I MUST WARN YOU...

WHAT?!

IS THAT TRUE?!

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!

THERE ARE ALREADY SO MANY THINGS I HAD TO GIVE UP!

YOU WILL HAVE TO GIVE UP MANY THINGS FROM YOUR PREVIOUS LIFE IN EXCHANGE.

THAT EVEN IF YOU ARE FREED FROM THE DISEASE ...

YOU WILL BECOME A PUPPET,

...THE POWERLESS TOY OF THE AQUA VITAE!

WHAT DO YOU CHOOSE?

Die

Live

SO...

GUY..

HAA

HAA

HAA

HAA

HAA

HAA

HAA

HAA

I NEVER ASKED YOU THAT!

I'LL TAKE THIS CHANCE TO LET YOU KNOW THAT I WAS A GOOD BOY, AND ADORABLE, TOO!

IT WAS A TERRIBLE CHOICE FOR SOMEONE MY AGE.

AT THE TIME, I WAS ONLY FOURTEEN.

...IN ORDER TO ESCAPE FROM THE SUFFER-ING.

I DIDN'T REALLY HAVE A CHOICE...

I BECAME A SHIRO-GANE...

AND THEN?

I CHOSE TO BECOME THE PUPPET OF THE AQUA VITAE, EVEN THOUGH I DIDN'T FULLY UNDERSTAND THE IMPLICATIONS OF IT.

RATHER THAN DYING LIKE A MISERABLE DOG...

THAT'S WHEN I UNDERSTOOD WHAT MARIE MEANT...

..WAS LOOKING BACK AT ME, A LITTLE ALARMED.

AND WHEN I LOOKED IN THE MIRROR, ANOTHER "ME" WITH SILVERY EYES...

WHAT DID YOU FEEL AT THAT TIME?!

WHEN I GOT UP, I FELT THAT MY BODY WAS FULL OF VITALITY, EVEN WITH MY SKINNY BODY.

DESTROY THE AUTOMA-TONS!!

SOMEONE OTHER THAN ME WAS GOING TO MAKE ALL THE DECISIONS.

MY BODY WAS NOT MINE ANY-MORE.

DESTROY THE AUTO-MATONS!!

AAAHHH!

DESTROY ...

DESTROY THE AUTO-MATONS!!

DESTROY THE AUTO-MATONS!!

I DON'T UNDER-STAND!

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

I RECEIVED SPECIAL TRAINING FROM MARIE AND THE OTHERS, WHICH WOULD ENABLE ME TO DESTROY ALITOMATONS.

THEN ...

I MADE MY WAY TO THIS PLACE WITHOUT A THOUGHT...

ITS VICTIMS CAN TELL WHERE IT SPREADS AT ANY TIME, RIGHT?

DOES THAT MEAN THAT AUTOMATONS ALSO SUFFER FROM ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME?!

YES. YOU GUESSED VERY WELL, NARUMI.

WHAT?!

ONLY THE VICTIMS OF ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME KNOW THE HORROR IT BRINGS.

AH...

BUT .. WHAT ABOUT ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME?

THOSE WHO GET IT... WHY DO THEY HAVE TO BECOME SHIRO-GANES?

WHAT ?!

THE INTERNAL BODY FLUIDS OF ALITO-MATONS...

...ARE THE CAUSE OF ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME!

COME WITH ME, NARUMI, AND YOU WILL FIND ANSWERS TO MANY MORE QUESTIONS.

RIGHT NOW, AS WE SPEAK, THEY KEEP ON SPREADING THIS TERRIBLE DISEASE ALL OVER THE WORLD.

YOU LOOK SURPRISED, NARUMI.

SHIT, MAN!

FLAP

ACT VII: KARAKURI * A MAN

"THE MECHANICAL VAMPIRES"

THEY'LL TAKE .

HAA

BAM

HAH

EHH

ZAN

THEY'LL ...

.. ALL OF MY BLOOD...

DOTON

BAGUM

RRLOMM

AAAHHH!

GOHH

HHAAAAAAAA

SPLASCHHH

SCHLNG

GLOB GLOB GHHH GHHH

GLC GLC GLC

IT ISN'T THEM THAT WILL DO IT...

I WILL SUCK YOUR BLOOD LATER, QUIETLY ...

ZONG

DON'T BE SCARED...

...KIDS!

ACT VII: KARAKURI * A MAN

"THE MECHANICAL VAMPIRES"

...FLAVIO, I WILL DO IT WITH DELIGHT!

ME...

ZONK

GAH !!!

...RIGHT AFTER I KILL GUY, WHO'LL COME WITHOUT FAIL TO SAVE YOU!

GUH ...

SHUT UP, OLD HAG! I'LL SUCK YOUR ROTTEN BLOOD SOON ENOUGH...

OKAY... THOSE...

...YOU CAN HAVE THEM!

WHAT?! THERE ARE PEOPLE OUTSIDE?

CLE

CLE

Carnac, Northwestern France

!

POLICE

POLICE

TAN TAN

LET'S GO!!!

HM.. UNTIL NOW, THEY HAVEN'T ASKED FOR ANYTHING...

...

LIEUTENANT MALICLAIR, DO YOU REALLY THINK THAT THEY ONLY WANT A RANSOM?

WE HAVE ENOUGH MEN TO PUT THEM OUT OF COMMISSION!

WE'RE FINALLY GOING TO DEAL WITH THESE KIDNAPPERS !!!

...

THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO ASK THAT KIND OF QUESTION! LET'S GO!

I'D LIKE TO KNOW WHAT THEY DID WITH THE OTHER 80 HOSTAGES, DON'T YOU?!

WE CAME HERE IMMEDIATELY BECAUSE WE LEARNED THAT THE BUS DRIVER, A TEACHER, AND FOUR OF HER PUPILS HAD BEEN BROUGHT TO THIS HOUSE!

THEY JUST ATTACKED A BUS FULL OF SCHOOL CHILDREN!

BRAAM

LIEUTEN-
ANT!

LOOK...

POLICE

THAT'S CRAZY!

WHAT KIND OF WEAPONS ARE THEY USING?!

CLAC CLAC CLAC CLAC CLAC CLAC CLAC CLAC

FIRE AT WILL !!!

OH-BAM-BAM-BAM-BAM

F--

FIRE!

SLAW SLAW

DAEN

?!

DOOF

...OH, GOD...

GHH

CLC CLC

AAAAHHH!

OOOH

VHHH...

GUY, WHAT'S IT ALL MEAN?!

YOU CAME TO JAPAN TO "RECRUIT" ME AND MAKE A SHIROGANE OUT OF ME?!

GOOP

ALL THE SHIROGANES WHO DESTROY AUTOMATONS ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN INFECTED WITH ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME, RIGHT?

ANSWER ME, GUY!

SHUT YOUR TRAP! IT TAKES ME GREAT CONCENTRATION TO MAKE OLYMPIA FLY! FURTHERMORE, AT THIS ALTITUDE IT'S VERY COLD!

GOOH H

WELL .. IT'S OBVIOUS, NARUMI!

WHY DO YOU ASK SUCH AN OBVIOUS QUESTION?

BUT YOU TOLD YOURSELF THAT IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA TO TURN ME INTO A SHIROGANE ANYWAY, RIGHT?!

I DIDN'T CATCH THAT DISEASE THAT WAY!

NOWADAYS, NO MAN, NO SHIROGANE IS ABLE TO GO HEAD TO HEAD WITH AUTOMATONS WITH HIS BARE HANDS! THAT'S WHY I CAME TO JAPAN SO QUICKLY!

THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY THIS DISEASE CAN TELL WHERE OTHER VICTIMS ARE. THAT'S HOW I KNEW WHERE YOU WERE.

STOP LAUGHING SO STUPIDLY!!!

HA HA! THAT MADE THINGS EASY FOR ME!

...THEN SUDDENLY, YOU WERE ON THE BRINK OF DEATH!

I WAS WONDERING HOW I WOULD MANAGE TO MAKE YOU DRINK THE AQUA VITAE TO MAKE YOU A SHIROGANE...

THEN YOU BRING ME TO FRANCE AND ORDER ME TO FIGHT AGAINST BLOOD-THIRSTY AUTOMA-TONS!

YOU, YOU PUT AQUA VITAE IN MY BODY!!!

WITHOUT ASKING ME!!!

I'LL NEVER AGREE TO DO SOME-THING LIKE THAT!

YOU SCHMUCK!

YOU'RE TOTALLY CRAZY! I WON'T DO IT!

...

...YOU WOULD HAVE PREFERRED TO DIE?

DOES THAT MEAN...

...CAN YOU TELL ME WITHOUT A DOUBT THAT YOU WOULDN'T HAVE TAKEN IT?

IF I HAD TOLD YOU THAT AQUA VITAE CAN CURE ALL DISEASES ...

BECAUSE OF THAT DISEASE, YOU WOULD HAVE CERTAINLY DIED VERY YOUNG...

...NNN...

...WH...

...I...

COUGH

COUGH

SHUT UP! I'M NARUMI! I'LL NEVER BE ANYONE OR ANYTHING ELSE!!!

...SHIRO-GANE!

YOU SHOULD BE HAPPY, NARUMI... OR SHOULD I SAY...

BUT THAT ALSO DEFINITELY HEALED YOU OF ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME!

THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT. I MOSTLY INJECTED YOU WITH THE AQUA VITAE SO THAT THE LOSS OF YOUR ARM WOULDN'T KILL YOU.

YOU GOTTA AGREE, THOUGH ...

IT'S NOT MUCH FUN...

DFF

...JUST BECAUSE SOMEONE ELSE TELLS YOU TO.

FIGHTING AGAINST SOMEONE ...

YOOH

GOOHH

THEY'RE AN ATTRACTION IN THIS REGION.

THESE STANDING STONES ARE CALLED MENHIRS.

WHAT ARE ALL THOSE BIG STONES?

...THAT FLAVIO IS WAITING FOR US. THIS IS THE MEETING POINT THAT AUTOMATON GAVE US.

LOOK!

NARUMI, IT'S IN THIS HOUSE...

I'M TELLING YOU, I WON'T FIGHT!

HM?!

BAM

BAM

BAM

...DON'T YOU DIE?

DAMN DEMONS!

BUT ...

WHY...

POLICE

CLIC CLIC CLIC CLIC

CLIC CLIC CLIC CLIC CLIC CLIC

LAST!

... YOU ARE ...

THE ...

HUMAN ...

GET DOWN! RIGHT NOW !!!

IT'S THE END!

!!

GGGG

SCRA

SHIT! I DIDN'T EVEN THINK !!!

YOU ALWAYS SAY YOU WON'T HELP ME .. BUT IN FACT

BRRK

LOOM

ACT.VII: KARAKURI * A MAN

"A MAN WHO FIGHTS"

SSAH

Carnac, Northwestern France

PLEASE STEP ASIDE, LIEUTEN-ANT.

WHO ARE YOU?!

I'M FED UP WITH THIS!

PFFF!

TAN

KILL HIM!

THAT'S HIM!

GUY?

...MUST DIE !!!

THIS SHIRO-GANE ...

ZA

FOOL
ON
ALL

SPLASH

BLOOBUB

BLOB

THAW

SPLASH

MY BLOOD... MY VITAL... FLUIDS...

THEY'RE... HEATING UP!!!

TAN DOTON TAN DOTON

WH...

WHAT?

DATAN DOTON

SPLAAFF

DOTON

IS HE A...

NEW SHIROGANE?

...BARE-HANDED.

WHO IS THIS?

HE DOESN'T HAVE A PUPPET AND HE FIGHTS US...

MY NAME IS NARUMI!

GOOH

A SHIROGANE?

ARE YOU KIDDING ME?!

NO!

WE MUST WAIT FOR FLAVIO!

GOOH

DAMN HUMAN!

YOU DARE MOCK US?!

NARUMI, YOU SHOULD RUN! YOU SHOULD NOT CONFRONT FLAVIO'S LACKEYS FACE TO FACE! IF THEY CATCH UP TO YOU, YOU'RE DONE FOR!

RUN AWAY!

THESE THINGS ARE TOO QUICK!

WATCH OUT!!!

AND YET... NOW ...

WHY ARE YOU GETTING ANGRY?

SHUT YER TRAP!

SHUT UP!!!

ON THE WAY HERE, I SWORE TO MYSELF THAT I WOULD NEVER FIGHT AGAINST THESE AUTOMATONS!

DONF

HOLD

HA

SDAA AHF

!
ZAK
SAH
BAM

TAN TAN

SRAAA A.F

... FLAVIO!

WE MUST WARN ...

HUH?

"SHIRO-GANES"

EVEN THE POLICE SPECIAL FORCES COULDN'T SCRATCH THOSE THINGS!

I'D LIKE TO KNOW WHO YOU ARE...

UH... SAY...

SHIROGANES... I HEARD ABOUT THEM. THEY'RE A GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS WHO TRAVEL FROM COUNTRY TO COUNTRY TO ACCOMPLISH A MISSION.

YOUR SUPERIORS WILL UNDERSTAND.

IN YOUR REPORT, YOU SHALL WRITE...

...ONLY ONE WORD: "SHIRO-GANES"

OUR OBJECTIVE IS...

THE COMPLETE ELIMINATION OF ALL AUTOMATONS.

...ARE YOU PART OF THAT GROUP?

NOBODY KNOWS WHAT THEY DO, BUT THE GOVERNMENTS OF ALL COUNTRIES SYSTEMATICALLY ALLOW THEM TO ACT UNCHECKED, WHATEVER THEY DO. THEY ALWAYS REACH THEIR OBJECTIVES, WITHOUT REGARD FOR THE MEANS...

WH... WHY?!

GUH

GUH... GUH... GUH...

HM?

WHAT IS IT, NARUMI?

GUY, I WARN YOU! I SWORE THAT I'D NEVER OBEY YOU!!!

YOU SAVE MY LIFE, WHEN I NEVER ASKED ANYTHING OF ANYONE! THEN YOU FORCE ME TO FIGHT!!!

WHY AM I FIGHTING, EVEN AGAINST MY WILL?!

FUAA

ZAAANN

COUGH
COUGH
COUGH

SHUT UP!!!

YOU'RE GONNA STOP THIS LITTLE GAME RIGHT NOW!!!

TAN TAN TAN TAN

IT IS POINT-LESS TO RESIST!

YOU MUST ACCEPT REALITY!

I'M WORRIED ABOUT THE CHILDREN AND THE TEACHER.

ANYWAY ...

...WE HAVE TO ASK FOR REIN-FORCE-MENTS.

AT THE BEGINNING, WE CAME HERE TO ARREST A HOSTAGE TAKER...

WHAT DID YOU SAY JUST NOW?!

THIS IS RIDICULOUS! I'VE DECIDED NOT TO FIGHT! BELIEVE ME, WHEN I DECIDE SOMETHING...

HUH?!

A WITNESS SAW A TEACHER AND FOUR OF HER PUPILS BEING KIDNAPPED.

SO THEY DIDN'T ONLY TAKE ONE OF YOUR OLD TEACHERS?!

THEY ALSO TOOK OTHER PEOPLE, TO SUCK OUT THEIR BLOOD?!

AUTOMATONS FEED ON HUMAN BLOOD. THIS KIND OF INCIDENT ALWAYS HAPPENS...

...AROUND PLACES WHERE THEY RESIDE TEMPORARILY!

CHILDREN... ARE INSIDE... RIGHT NOW...

AUTOMATONS MUST BE EXTERMINATED.

I THOUGHT I WAS CLEAR, NARUMI.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THIS CHILD?

... ARE COMING BACK.

FRAGMENTS OF MY MEMORY...

AND THERE'S ALL THIS WATER...

THE WALLS ARE COLLAPSING...

DID THIS CHILD DIE?!

BRRRRR

...IN FRONT OF MY EYES?!

RIGHT...

ZZAAA

I DON'T THINK IT'S NECESSARY.

I'M GOING TO CALL FOR BACKUP.

NO

TA

AN

AT LEAST WAIT UNTIL BACKUP ARRIVES!

EVEN IF YOU'RE REALLY STRONG, YOU WON'T HAVE A CHANCE AGAINST THEM BY YOURSELF!

THEY'RE MON-STERS !!!

STOP!!! DON'T GO IN !!!

DAAH

WHY?

...

I REMEMBER ONLY A FEW THINGS FROM MY PAST,

BUT... THERE'S ONE THING I KNOW...

IT'S IMPOS-SIBLE.

...LET'S WORK AS A TEAM.

NARUMI, I'M GOING TO TRY TO ENTER FROM THE BACK OF THE BUILDING.

WHEN I HEAR CHILDREN CRYING IN FEAR OR IN DISTRESS...

...I'VE GOT TO HELP!

YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT, BUT

YES

HE'S CRAZY...

HEHEHE...

HA HA

I CHOSE HIM!

THAT'S EXACTLY WHY...

LICE

HM?

WHAT IS IT?

FLAVIO

YOU CAN STILL RUN AWAY...

KUH

I SEE THIS MAN CAME WITH GUY.

I CAN'T WAIT TO DRAIN HIM OF HIS BLOOD!

I'M SO HAPPY!

...ARE WAY TOO STRONG FOR YOU.

THE SHIROGANES FOR WHOM YOU THINK YOU'VE LAID A TRAP...

YOU CAN JUST WATCH HOW I'LL KILL THEM LITTLE BIT BY LITTLE BIT!

CL CL C CL C

YOU TALK TOO MUCH, OLD COOT!

GAAAH !!!

I'll take care of this monster
Take this chance and run with
the children

FLAP

OK... LET'S GO!

MISS!

WAIT!

VVVHHH

ALL OF MY MEN HAVE BEEN KILLED BY THE KIDNAPPERS!

THIS IS LT. MAUCLAIR! THIS IS A PRIORITY CALL! I AM REQUESTING REINFORCE-MENTS!

ACT VII: KARAKURI * A MAN

"THE WIND AND THE LIGHT"

TWO MEN WENT IN TO TRY TO SAVE THEM.

THEY'RE KEEPING A SCHOOL TEACHER AND FOUR OF HER PUPILS IN A HOUSE!

OF COURSE IT'S NOT A JOKE! THE SITUATION IS CRITICAL!

HUH?

WE CAN'T DO ANYTHING, EVEN WITH OUR WEAPONS. THE KIDNAPPERS LOOK LIKE ROBOTS!

ALL THEY SAID IS THAT THE BRASS WOULD UNDERSTAND WHO THEY WERE IF WE SAID...

WHAT? NO, I DON'T KNOW WHO THEY ARE!

...
SHIRO-
GANE!

IT'S
REALLY
DARK

BUT
THEY'RE
DEFI-
NITELY
THERE

SO THERE'S
THREE LEFT
WITH THINGS
AS THEY ARE,
I'LL WAIT FOR
THEM TO ACT

I TOOK OUT
FOUR OF
THEM.

THIS
REMINDS
ME OF THAT
TIME WITH MY
MASTER IN
CHINA...

HHH

YES, MASTER..

MING-HAI*, YOU'RE AFRAID OF THE DARK, AREN'T YOU?

*THIS IS HOW NARUMI'S NAME IS READ IN CHINESE

THEIR BLADES WILL COME FROM ALL DIRECTIONS.

NOW, ALL THESE PEOPLE WILL ATTACK YOU.

AH

BUT... THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! I WON'T BE ABLE TO DO THAT!

AND YOU, YOU WILL FIGHT WITHOUT OPENING YOUR EYES.

FLAP

ZING

THE AIR THEY DISPLACE WHEN MOVING

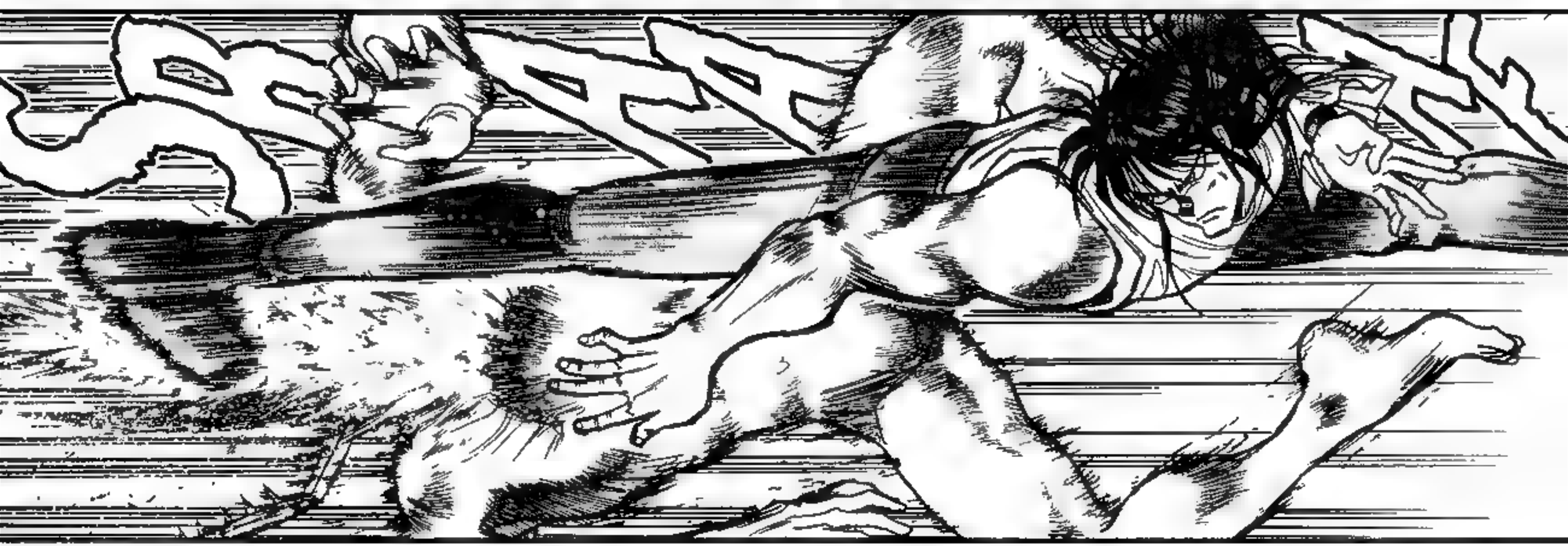
LISTEN FOR THEIR CRACKING JOINTS. THE RUSTLING OF THEIR CLOTHES LISTEN TO THE BEAT OF THE BLOOD IN THEIR TEMPLES...

SPLASH!

DOH

SSAT

SOB



HAA FUU

HAA FUU

TWO DOWN!

BRLOM

GOOD

THE ELDERS SAY NOT TO CONGRATULATE THE YOUNG TOO QUICKLY

HAA FUU

HAA FUU

ME?! A GENIUS?! YOU MUST BE MISTAKEN, MASTER! I RECEIVED SEVERAL NEAR-FATAL HITS!

BUT IF THERE WAS A FIGHTING GENIUS, IT WOULD BE YOU.

BUT... YOU ARE EXTREMELY FOCUSED. YOU PRACTICE EVERYTHING I TEACH YOU...

CERTAINLY ...

YOU STILL HAVE MUCH TO LEARN.

I WAS VERY LUCKY...

.. THE SIMPLEST TECHNIQUES!

EVEN FOR...

...AND YOU ALWAYS GIVE IT YOUR ALL.

THERE'S A SAYING: "GENIUSES ARE OFTEN DEFEATED BY THEIR OWN GENIUS"! WHEN ONE HAS TOO MUCH TALENT, ONE CAN BECOME SELF-IMPORTANT

THE GENIUS I'M TALKING ABOUT IS NOT THAT KIND OF GENIUS.

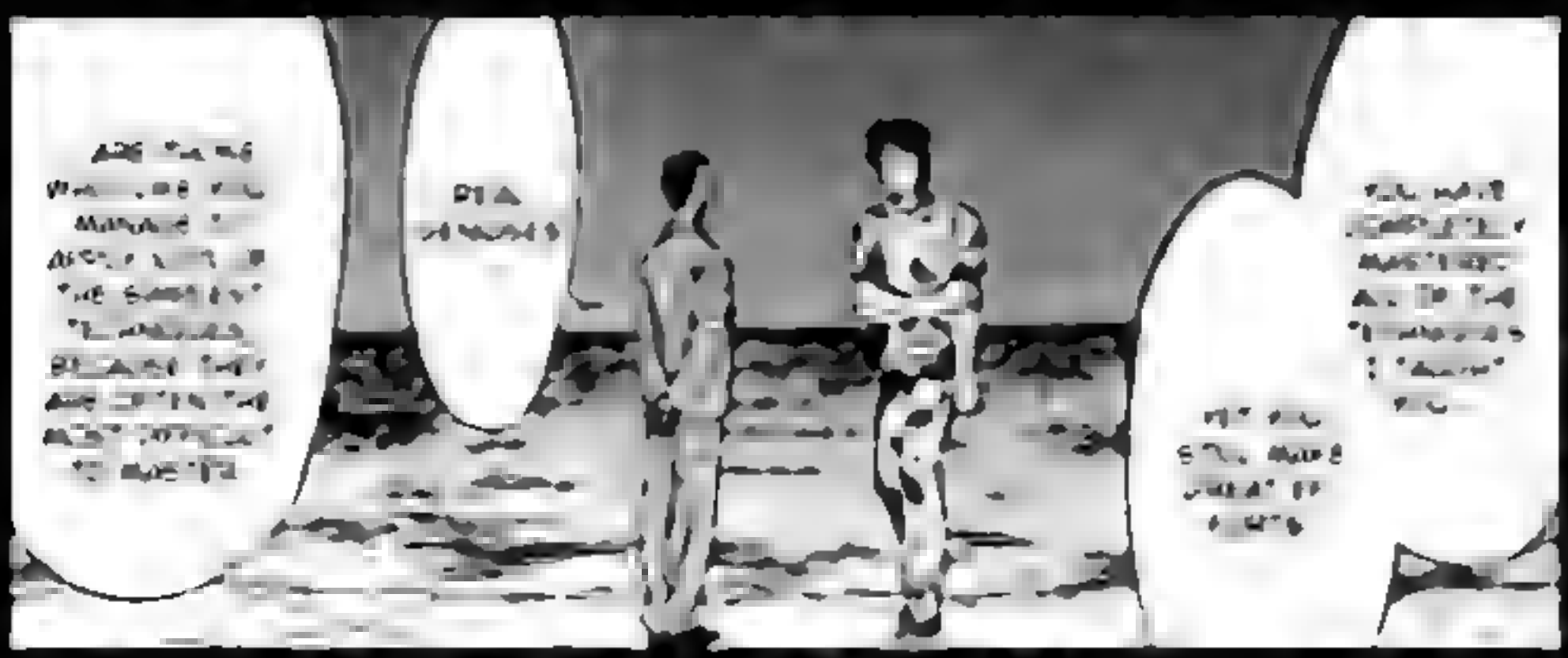
HE'S AN EXCEPTIONAL FIGHTER! ME... I'M KINDA SLOW..

THE FIGHTING GENIUS SHOULD BE BROTHER WANG!

EVEN IF IT TOOK YOU FOREVER, YOU WOULD REPEAT THE MOVEMENTS, AGAIN AND AGAIN...

EVERY TIME I ASKED YOU TO PRACTICE SOMETHING WITH 100% OF EFFORT, YOU DID IT WITHOUT EVEN A COMPLAINT.

SHH
SHH


PIA

"WHAT GOOD IS IT...

...TO BECOME SO STRONG?!"

BUT NOW, YOU HAVE BECOME VERY STRONG.

FLOP

INHERENTLY, YOU DON'T LIKE FIGHTING WITH OTHERS...

I KNOW YOU WERE OFTEN BULLIED WHEN YOU WERE LIVING IN JAPAN.

...

I STARTED TO LEARN KUNG FU BECAUSE I HATED FEELING SO POWERLESS. BUT NOW... I WONDER...

MASTER, I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK ANYMORE.

...

AND YOU'RE STARTING TO WONDER...

"WHAT GOOD IS IT?"

MY COUNTRY WAS AT PEACE... AND I DIDN'T FEEL LIKE...

...MAKING A NAME FOR MYSELF IN KI TOURNAMENTS OR ULTIMATE FIGHTING*.

"WHAT WILL I USE THIS STRENGTH FOR?"

I ASKED MYSELF THIS QUESTION THE LAST TIME I WENT BACK TO JAPAN.

*FREE-FIGHTING TOURNAMENTS VERY POPULAR IN JAPAN, BRAZIL AND THE US, WHERE FIGHTERS ARE FROM DIFFERENT FIGHTING SCHOOLS.

...OR WITH COOKS, WHO WERE A BIT TOO SPIRITED.

YOU WOULD ALWAYS GET INTO FIGHTS, ESPECIALLY WITH THE MAFIA TYPES WHO CARRIED PISTOLS...

IS THAT WHY YOU CAUSED A LOT OF MISCHIEF...

...AFTER YOUR RETURN HERE?

.. I WOULD UNDERSTAND SOMETHING. BUT IT WASN'T ANY HELP!

I THOUGHT THAT BY PUTTING MYSELF IN DANGER...

I'M SORRY, MASTER.

I'M TALKING ABOUT THAT INVISIBLE AND SAD WIND THAT BLOWS IN THE HEARTS OF MEN WHO, LIKE YOU...

HUH?

...WITHIN YOUR HEART...

A WIND THAT BLOWS...

MING-HAI, THAT WIND WAS ALSO BLOWING IN THE HEARTS OF MANY COURAGEOUS HEROES...

...THAT WIND...

...POSSESS EXTRA-ORDINARY STRENGTH,

BUT DON'T KNOW WHAT TO USE IT FOR...

...HOW TO STOP THAT WIND!

NOBODY BUT YOU CAN FIND OUT...

YES...

...I REMEMBERED THE FACE OF THAT KID.

IT'S BECAUSE BEFORE ENTERING THIS HOUSE...

WHY AM I THINKING ABOUT THAT?

THAT'S WEIRD ...

EVEN IF I STILL DON'T KNOW WHO HE WAS AND WHAT CONNECTED US TOGETHER

LITTLE BY LITTLE IMAGES COME BACK TO ME

EVEN IF I'VE LOST MOST OF MY MEMORIES, IT'S EASY TO IMAGINE THAT HE WAS SOMEHOW LINKED TO MY ACCIDENT.

THAT KID WITH THE EXTRAORDINARY SMILE.

BRIOM

SBLOOM

...
SHIT!

BRLLNNG

...
WHY?

WHY DID I FAIL?!

BAM

WHEN I...
WAS SO STRONG !!!

HAA

HAA

BOM

SCR

"I'M WORRIED ABOUT THE CHILDREN"...

..."AS WELL AS THE TEACHER"

PFFF...

THAT MAKES ME WANNA KILL YOU EVEN MORE!

I'M IM-PRESSED. FOR A SIMPLE HUMAN...

YOU'RE VERY STRONG!

CLAP

CLAP

CLAP

CLAP CLAP

THIS TIME, EVERY-THING WILL CHANGE ...

HUMANS ARE MY PETS!

YEAH

I'M FLAVIO.

YOU'RE THE ONE CALLED FLAVIO?

GAH!

ZZAN

SCHLING

EH!

TRY NOT TO HURT MY LITTLE PETS!

BASTARD!!

TAKE THAT, HUMAN !!!

OOF!

!

GONG

STOP THAT, YOU OLD COOT!!!

ACT VII: KARAKURI * A MAN

"THE FIGHT AGAINST FLAVIO"

THIS NOTE...

WHERE DID THEY GO!?

TAN TAN TAN

MARY!

PAUL!

EMILY!

ANDREW!

BUT EVEN IF I HAVE A CHANCE TO RUN AWAY...

...I DON'T WANNA LEAVE BY MYSELF!

"TAKE THIS CHANCE TO RUN WITH THE CHILDREN."

"I'LL TAKE CARE OF THIS MONSTER."

...THAT OLD LADY NAILED ON THE MONSTER'S SHOULDER GAVE IT TO ME.

I'll take care of this monster. Take this chance and run with the children

WHO BROUGHT ME TRASH LIKE THIS!?

HA HA HA HA !!!

.LET THEM... GO!!!

YOU.

AH?

I CAN SMELL YOUR SCENT... YOU ARE... A SHIROGANE, TOO.

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

TO THINK THAT YOU DESTROYED ALL MY MINIONS SO EASILY! I WAS WONDERING HOW POWERFUL YOU REALLY WERE! BUT... WITH THESE KIDS AS HOSTAGES, YOU CAN'T DO ANYTHING! ...WHAT A PATHETIC FIGHTER!

"AND AUTO-MATONS .. TO PUPPETS!"

"DUST... TO DUST"

YOU HAVE TO DESTROY... THIS AUTO-MATON!

NO MATTER... WHO THE... HOSTAGES ARE...

AND YOU, FLAVIO... LET THOSE KIDS GO!

LADY, YOU'RE MISTAKEN... I'M NOT A SHIROGANE...

SAH...

SHE CHOOSES OUR DESTRUCTION IN COLD BLOOD RATHER THAN THE LIFE OF THOSE CHILDREN!

HA HA HA! NO DOUBT ABOUT THAT, HER MISSION IS TO INSTRUCT AND BE A MODEL FOR ALL SHIROGANES!

FLAVIO ...

SHUT UP, FILTHY HUMAN !!!

SLAM

AH!!

OBVIOUSLY, AS LONG AS THE CHILDREN ARE HELD PRISONER, HE CAN'T DO ANYTHING, AND HE MAY BE KILLED.

WHO IS THIS MAN?

DID HE COME TO SAVE US?

SAY. WHY IS SHE RAISING HER HANDS?

WOOM

HERE'S MY NEW ATTACK!

ZA

CRRAAAC

HUH!?

GO!!!

NOW, LUCILLE!

CAN'T YOU SEE YOU'RE BOTHERING ME, OLD COOT!?

AAAO

HAH! THAT'S THE THIRD OLD COOT THAT I COULDN'T CATCH A WHILE AGO!

ZOING

RRAAH !!

SCHLIINNG

STAY HERE, YOU DOG !!!

GOH

GOH GOH GOH

GRAHH

LET ME GO!!!

FILTHY HUMANS !!!

CRAC CRA

RRR

SCHROO

BR

LO M

HURRY... LEAVE... WITH THE CHILDREN...

...AH...

DO IT FOR THE CHILDREN!

HAVE COURAGE!

...WON'T MOVE..

MY LEGS...

GU

HU

THEIR LIVES ARE IN YOUR HANDS!

YOU ARE THEIR TEACHER!

GRR

HAA...

HAA...

HAA...

DAN

COME HERE, FILTHY OLD BITCH!

...THANK YOU!

Y... YES..

ARE YOU THE TEACHER? HURRY AND RUN AWAY WITH THEM!

MISS!

CHILDREN!

HUMANS, YOU WON'T ESCAPE FROM ME!!!

SHIT!

AH...

I'VE SEEN SOMETHING LIKE THIS BEFORE... IN MY LIFE...

YOU'RE REALLY STUPID, FLAVIO !!!

HA HA HA HA!

WHAT !?

KING!

R-R-R-A-A-A-G

FILTHY HUMAN VERMIN !!!

SBAM

BLAM

ZIOW

SHE'S OBVIOUSLY USED TO FIGHTING.

IN SUCH A SMALL SPACE, SHE CAN PREVENT FLAVIO FROM MOVING EITHER WAY...

THIS OLD WOMAN IS PRETTY STRONG...

I THINK SHE'S GONNA WIN...

WHILE LUCILLE IS FIGHTING ...

.. YOU MUST FLEE!

YOU'RE STILL ALIVE !?

WHAT . ARE YOU... WAITING FOR?

IF YOU'RE NOT .. A SHIROGANE... YOU MUST... LEAVE QUICKLY

WHAT!?

KRIAN

LUCILLE IS TOO OLD TO MAINTAIN THIS LEVEL OF FOCUS FOR LONG .

TO CONTROL A COMBAT PUPPET REQUIRES EXTRAORDINARY FOCUS!

CRAC... CRAC...

HA HA! I SHOULD HAVE PAID MORE ATTENTION!

KWAM

TAC

ZLING

EH!

ZZOO

...WHEN SHE AND HER PUPPET ALREADY HAVE A FOOT IN THE DOOR!

I ALMOST OVERESTI-MATED THIS SHIROGANE ...

HA HA...

FUU...

MUJINY, ATTACK !!!

DON'T BE RIDICU-LOUS!

CAN'T KEEP UP ANYMORE?

SO, OLD FOOL!

I CAN TELL THAT YOUR PRETENTIOUS PUPPET CAN'T...

HA HA! IT'S USE-LESS!

DAAHH!

...MAINTAIN TOP SPEED ANYMORE !!!

GRRRAAAA

KRRRRR

BRLOW

AHA!

I'D LIKE TO RUN AWAY.

YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE A PUPPET... YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO FIGHT THIS AUTOMATON.

THIS IS WHY . YOU MUST RUN...

SHIT!

GRAC GRAC

PAC

I WOULDN'T MOVE A FINGER FOR LUCILLE.

SAH...

...THAT SHIROGANE CONSIDERED THEIR MISSION MORE IMPORTANT THAN HUMAN LIFE ...

IF IT'S LIKE YOU SAID EARLIER ...

...YOU SAVED THE KIDS.

YOU...

BUT...

YOU SAVED THE KIDS!

YOU...

BUT...

SO, TO THANK YOU, I'M GONNA SHOW YOU WHAT I REALLY AM!

YOU HAD THE GALL TO HIT MY FACE... ME, FLAVIO!

I'M GONNA GIVE YOU A PRESENT...

LUCILLE, HEAD INSTRUCTOR OF THE SHIROGANES.

CLONG

LOOK ME IN THE EYE BEFORE YOU DIE!!!

ZAP

WHAT'S THAT!?

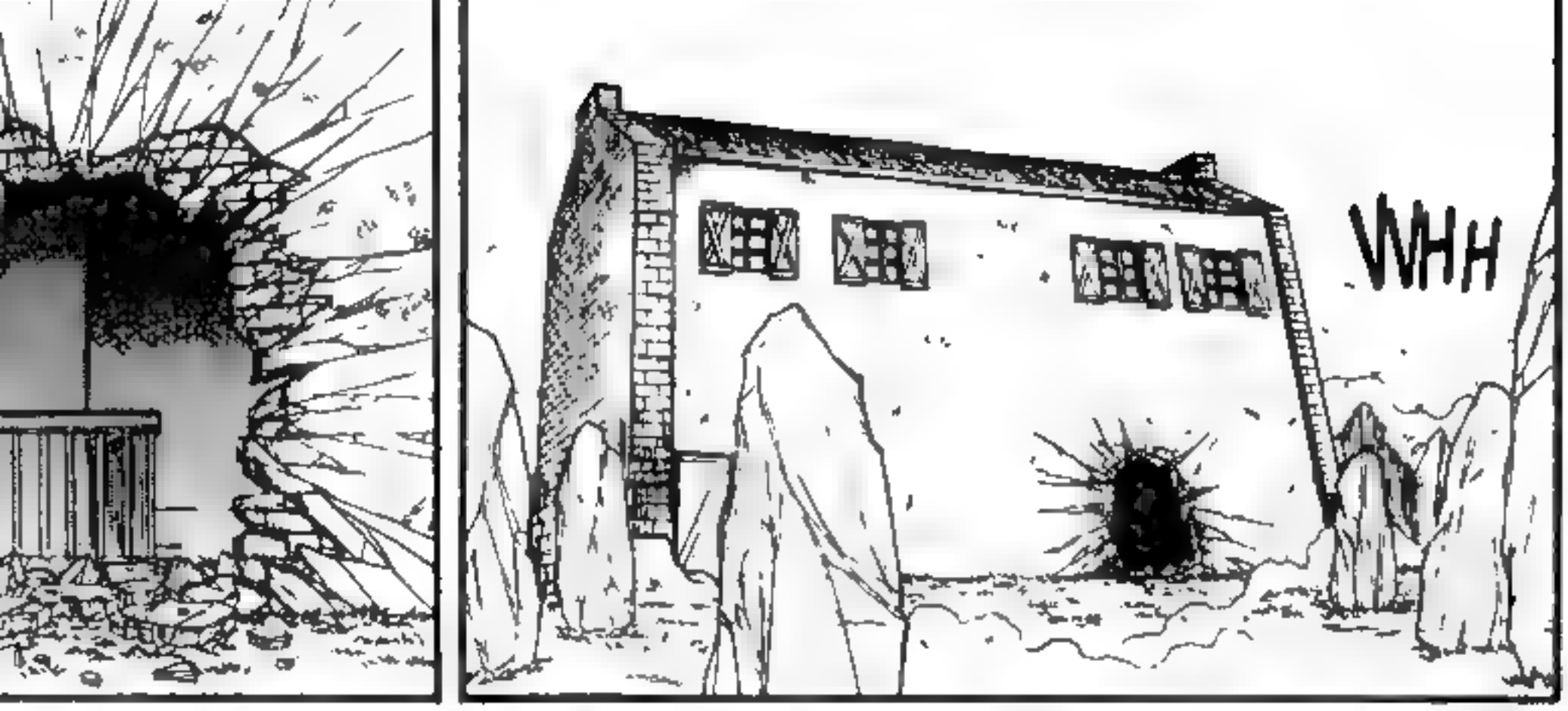
SLASH

YOUR OPPONENT...

YOU'RE LOOKING AT THE WRONG PERSON!

...IS ME!!!

DOPE



ACT VII: KARAKURI * A MAN

"SCREAMS"

DOON

OH!

IT HAS BEGUN ...

NARUMI DID A GOOD JOB!

WE WERE ABLE TO CLEAN THE PLACE UP, RIGHT, OLYMPIA?

BRROMM

NOW, NARUMI, YOU WILL SHOW US YOUR STRENGTH.

FLAVIO IS VERY POWERFUL... YOU WILL NOT DEFEAT HIM SO EASILY.

DOOO

SHUT UP! BESIDES, I'M NOT A SHIRO-GANE!

POOR SHIROGANE! YOU'VE SEEN THAT I CAN'T BE BEATEN!

VLANG

BLNG

HA HA HA! IF THAT'S TRUE, THEN YOU'RE HERE JUST TO BE KILLED!

YOU THINK YOU CAN BEAT ME WITH THAT LITTLE POCKET KNIFE ON YOUR ARM?!

HA HA HA! VERY FUNNY! SO YOU'RE HERE JUST BECAUSE SOME BRATS WERE BAWLING?!

YOU CHAINED KIDS TO YOUR ARM! THEY WERE SCREAMING IN TERROR!

BELIEVE ME, I'LL NEVER FORGIVE YOU!

WOOM

SBAM!

SO WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO, PUNK?!

GO H

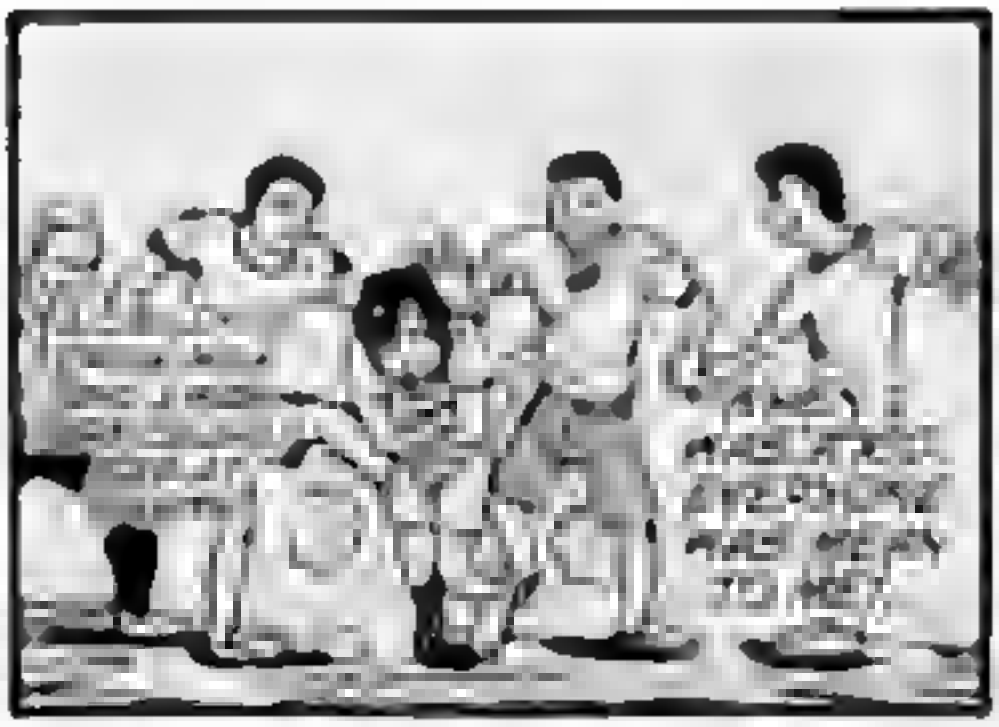
BRLOM-M

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO RISK YOUR LIFE FOR SOMETHING SO INSIGNIFICANT?

BUT.. WHY ARE YOU SO HUNG UP ON THOSE SCREAMING BRATS?

FOR A MERE HUMAN, I GOTTA ADMIT THAT YOU'RE PRETTY STRONG.

AMONG ALL THOSE I'VE KILLED AND DRUNK BLOOD FROM, I'VE NEVER SEEN ONE LIKE YOU.



NO NOOO! YOU STILL WANNA FIGHT ?!

SLASH

DAN

BUT COMPARED TO ME, YOU'RE JUST A SPECK OF DUST!!!
HA HAAA! NICE MOVES!
FOR A HUMAN, YOU'RE VERY STRONG!
BLOOD CLANG

SSAH

YOU'RE WEAK! COMPLETELY AND UTTERLY WEAK!!!

...

I...

I'M GONNA BE A BIG BROTHER

THAT'S WHY

I...

YAAAH !!!

...WOULD LIKE TO BECOME STRONG!

DAH!

CAREFUL WITH THAT BLADE!

WHASH!!

BRAAAAY

BE STRONG ...

MADAM -

GHH

THE SITUATION

YOU HAVE TO ACCEPT

AND THAT SHE COULDN'T BE AROUND CHILDREN

I EVEN HEARD THAT SHE ALMOST DIED

IT WAS A DEVASTATING BLOW TO MY MOTHER

THIS IS GETTING BORING... SO I'M GONNA FINISH YOU OFF!

IT'S OVER.

YOUR STRENGTH IS GONE.

TON

SHA

...IF WE DON'T MIX THEM REGULARLY WITH HUMAN BLOOD.

AS YOU KNOW, OUR VITAL FLUIDS DON'T WORK VERY WEL...

THEN I'LL SUCK UP YOUR BLOOD!

THE SHIROGANES WHO HUNT US ARE JUST SURVIVORS! VICTIMS OF ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME! THEY MANAGE TO CLING TO LIFE ONLY BECAUSE OF THE AQUA VITAE!

EXACTLY!

IN FACT, THEY'RE JUST LIKE US!

WE'RE THE ONES... WHO GIVE YOU LIFE.

...YOU DON'T THINK YOU NEED KUNG FU ANYMORE...

YOU'VE LIVED THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES...

AND NOW...

DEATH FOLLOWS LIFE AND LIFE FOLLOWS DEATH

LISTEN TO ME CHILD FROM JAPAN EVERYTHING IN THE UNIVERSE IS BUT A TRANSFORMATION

THE SOUL OF YOUR BROTHER WHO WAS TO BE BORN...

ALL SOULS ARE BUT TRANSIENT TRAVELLERS CROSSING OUR UNIVERSE.

NAY ALREADY HAVE I APPEARED IN ANOTHER BODY

AH

MAS-HAI YOU MUST BECOME STRONG

SO THAT ONE DAY YOU MAY MEET THIS BROTHER THAT YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN

YOU MUST BECOME STRONG, TO PROTECT "ALL LIVES"!

WAAAAA!

HUH?

WHAT ARE YOU MUMBLING, HUMAN?

I DON'T LIKE IT

THE SHIRO-GANES!

YOU AUTOMA-TONS...

I DON'T LIKE ANY OF IT!

THIS FAKE ARM...

GOOHH

I DON'T LIKE IT!

GRN!

ALL OF THAT IS JUST CRAP!!!

ALCHEMY... THE AQUA VITAE...

HUMANS THAT KEEP ON LIVING THANKS TO A MIRACULOUS ELIXIR!

MACHINES THAT LIVE BY SUCKING HUMAN BLOOD!

YOU ALL PLAY WITH HUMAN LIVES...

...AS IF THEY WERE JUST TOYS!

...POOR IDIOT!!!

HA HA! YOU'RE LOSING IT!

IT'S OVER FOR YOU! HERE'S MY FINISHING BLOW!

ZZAAN

...TO BE READY FOR THE DAY I'D MEET MY "LITTLE BROTHER" IN THIS WORLD.

I LIKE..

..TO GO TO THE CIRCUS.

MASTER... I WANTED TO BECOME STRONG...

...TO BE STRONG!

I WANTED SO MUCH...

AND YET...

AAAHH!!!

...AND DISAPPEARED!

ONE LIFE ESCAPED FROM MY HANDS...

I...

...COULDN'T DO A THING!

YOU DON'T KNOW THE REAL VALUE OF LIFE!!!

GRUB

BRAAA

I NEED... HUMAN BLOOD !!!

I'M LOSING ALL MY FLUIDS!

GUWAH! IT'S IMPOS-SIBLE!

I CAN'T BE BEATEN... BY A HUMAN!

WHAT IS IT?

AH!

...WHY THE CRIES OF THE KIDS AFFECTED ME SO MUCH.

NOW I KNOW!

I-I THINK I UNDERSTAND NOW!

DAD! FOUND SOME!

AAAH!

...ARE ACTUALLY MY OWN!!!

THOSE KIDS' TEARS THAT GET ME SO RILED UP...

AAAHHH!!!

WAAAA!

...I WON'T LET IT HAPPEN EVER AGAIN!!!

FROM NOW ON...

GIMME YOUR BLOOD !!!

I'M LOSING ALL MY FLUIDS !!!

DON DON DON

ACT VII: KARAKURI * A MAN "BLOOD"

AAAAH!

RUN, MISS!

BAM BAM

I ALSO REMEMBER...

THAT I HAD PROMISED...

AAAA HHH!

I COULDN'T SAVE HIM!

I WILL SUCCEED !!!

NOO!

AH

GIMME YOUR BLOOD, YOU LITTLE BRATS !!!

GOOD

SCHL

GLOUP GLOUP GLOUP

DID YOU SEE THAT? AFTER THIS, YOU'RE NEXT!

HA HA HA! YOU POOR IDIOT!

GLOUP GLOUP

BOOM BOOM

HUH?

IT... CAN'T BE...

HE'S NOT BAD... RIGHT, GUY?

DID YOU SEE, LUCILLE? THAT'S NARUMI.

ZAN

YOU DEALT WITH THIS AUTOMATON BRILLIANTLY!

CONGRAT-ULATIONS, NARUMI!

HEY! CAN YOU HEAR ME?!

MISS!

MISS!

ANDREW ...

PAUL...

AH... YES!

CALL AN AMBU-LANCE !!!

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, LIEUTEN-ANT?!

ALL SAFE AND SOUND!

YOU ARE...

EMILY...

MARY...

DON'T WORRY! THEY'RE ALL SAFE! AND YOU WILL BE, TOO! YOU'LL BE BACK ON YOUR FEET SOON!

MISS...

THANK YOU.

MADAM ...

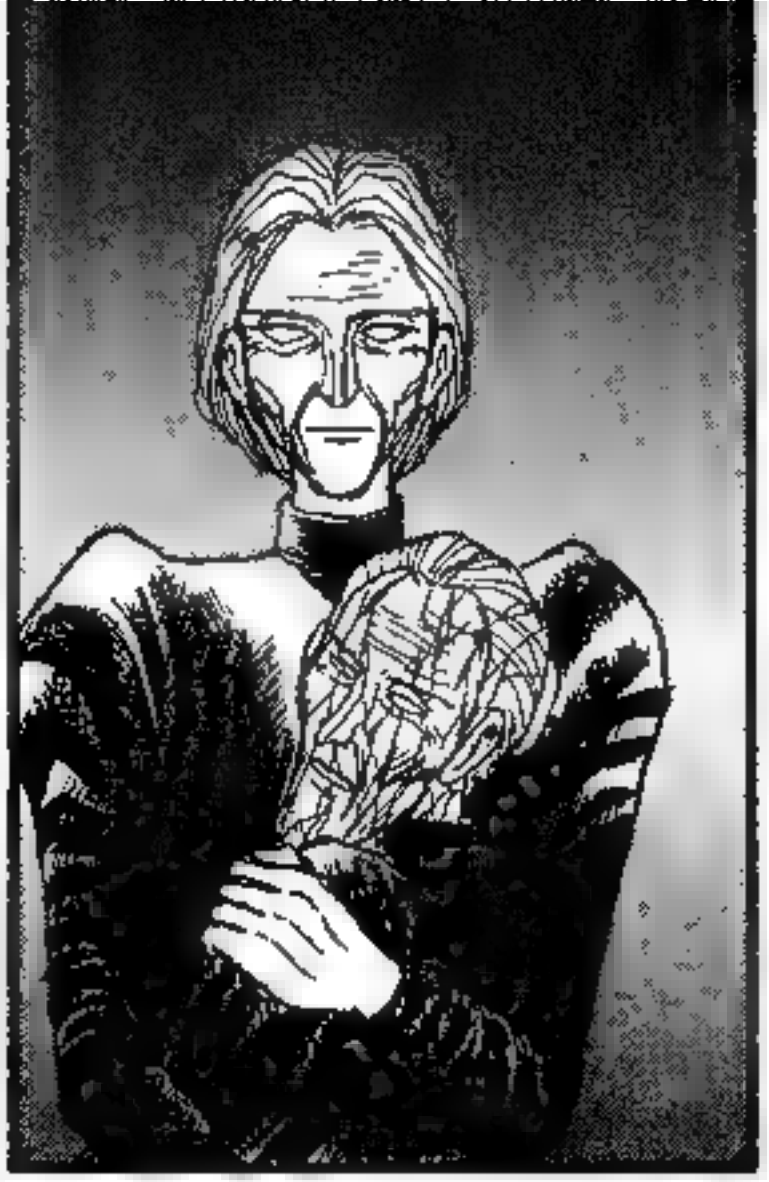
SHUT UP! UNDER-STOOD ?!

I AM SORRY, BUT SHE WILL NOT SURVIVE ...

NARUMI.

GAVE ME COURAGE...

YOUR WORDS ...



EHH...

I, TOO, WAS A TEACHER.

YOU KNOW... BEFORE I BECAME WHAT I AM TODAY...

MISS!

HEY! WAIT!

UNFOR-TUNATELY, IT WAS UNAVOID-ABLE...

STOP THAT NARUMI!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

!

THIS YOUNG MAN WILL HAVE TO GET USED TO THIS KIND OF SCENE...

WHAT?!

YOU TOLD ME THERE WAS A LITTLE BIT OF AQUA VITAE IN MY BLOOD, RIGHT?

DO YOU UNDERSTAND ALL THE CONSEQUENCES OF DOING THAT?!

BUT...

LET ME GO, GUY! I'M GONNA HAVE HER DRINK SOME OF MY BLOOD!

INTO A DESTROYER OF AUTOMATONS, CURSED FOR ETERNITY!

DON'T DO IT! ELSE YOU'LL BE TURNING A PERFECTLY INNOCENT HUMAN BEING...

SPAF

I WILL NOT ALLOW YOU TO DO THAT, NARUMI!

I DON'T NEED YOUR PERMISSION FOR ANYTHING, GUY!

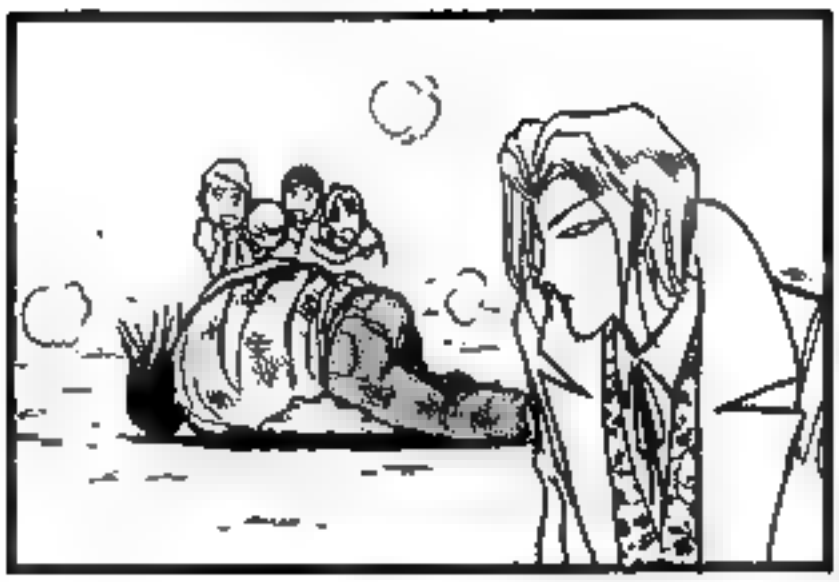
LIFE IS A HUNDRED TIMES BETTER THAN DEATH!

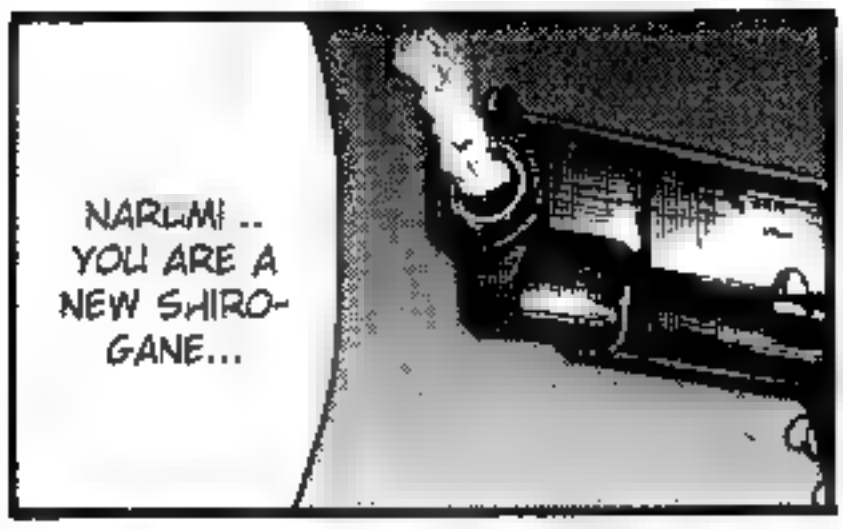
YES ...

BECAUSE ... WHATEVER HAPPENS ...

NARUMI... LET ME REMIND YOU THAT YOU RECENTLY UNLEASHED YOUR ANGER ON ME FOR ARBITRARILY SAVING YOUR LIFE...

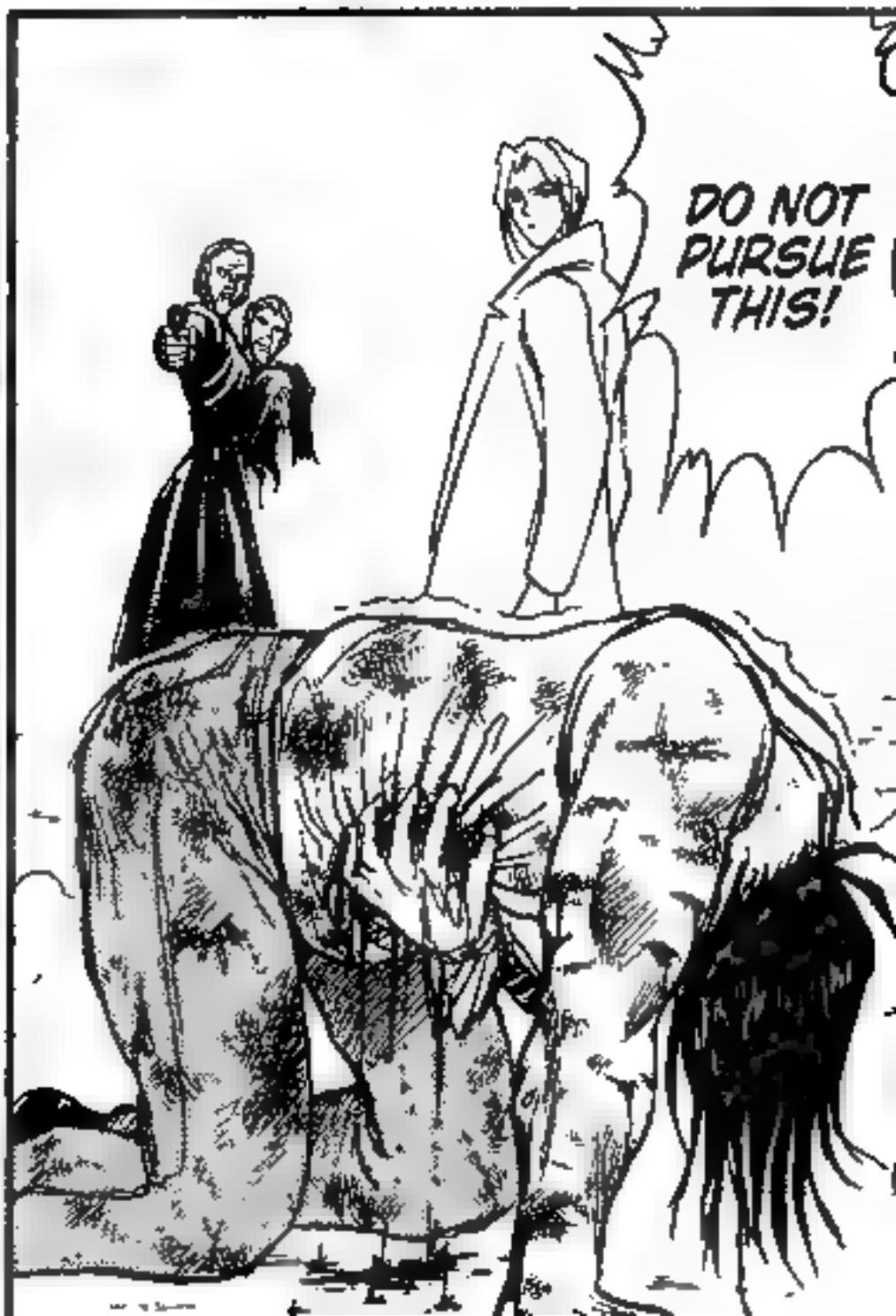
DO YOU INTEND TO DO WHAT YOU RESENTED ME FOR TO THIS WOMAN?




NARUMI .. YOU ARE A NEW SHIRO-GANE...

BAM

KNOW THAT THE GREATEST TABOO AMONG US SHIROGANES IS TO REVEAL OR SHARE THE SECRET OF THE AQUA VITAE WITH NORMAL PEOPLE NOT AFFECTED BY ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME.


DO NOT PURSUE THIS!

HAAA
HAA
HH
SAH

IF YOU REALLY WANNA STOP ME!

THIS IS WHERE YOU SHOULD AIM...

I DON'T CARE EITHER WAY!

DO YOU THINK I AM NOT SERIOUS?

VVHHH...

ANYBODY'S LIFE BEFORE.

I... I'VE NEVER SAVED...

WHY DO YOU INSIST ON SAVING OTHERS SO MUCH?

STOP IT, NARUMI!

WHAT ARE YOU BABBLING ABOUT?

THAT'S WHY I WANNA..

SAVE THEM ALL.

THIS BOY IS VERY INTER-ESTING ...

YES, TANIA?

LUCILLE ...

...

BRROOM

BUT... HIS FEELINGS ARE TRUE... AND HE IS VERY STRONG!

HE'S MORE STUBBORN THAN A DONKEY, A REAL RUFFIAN... EVEN UNDER PRESSURE, HE WILL NOT DO WHAT HE HAS DECIDED NOT TO DO...

TANIA, YOU ARE SMILING! I HAVE NEVER SEEN YOU SMILE BEFORE!

HA HA HA! DESPITE WHAT WE MIGHT THINK, MAYBE IT'S THIS KIND OF HUMAN WHO WILL PUT AN END TO THE WAR BETWEEN SHIROGANES AND AUTO-MATONS...

GRR

GRR

NARUMI ...

WAIT, NARUMI!...

SAH...

...LING

SCHA

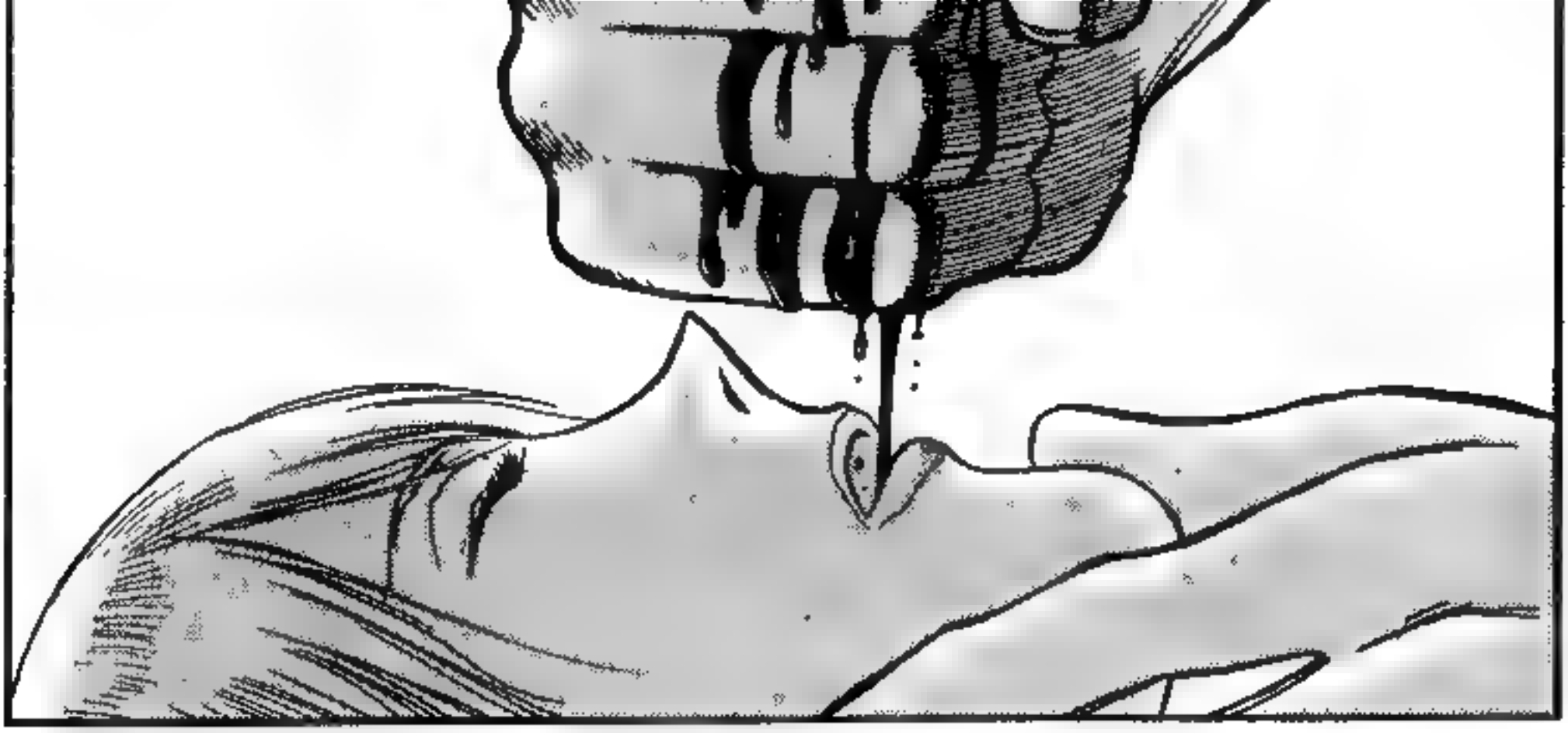
NARUMI!!

ZAN

ZAN

I'M WARNING YOU, DON'T DO IT!!!

ZAN



ZLA-AN

YOUR TEACHER ISN'T GONNA DIE...

ZAN
ZAN
GRRR...

COME ON, KIDS, DON'T WORRY...

SHIIING

GUY!

IN THAT CASE, NARUMI ...

YOU'RE GOING TO...

IT IS TOO LATE...

SAH

AHHH

GHH...

OUA A AHHA

...
THAT I'VE... MANAGED TO SAVE... SOMEONE'S LIFE.

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME...

ALL OF YOU!

GHH

THANK YOU .. THANK YOU...

THANK YOU...

ACT VII: KARAKURI**A MAN

"THE CURTAIN GOES DOWN"

THAT I'VE MANAGED TO SAVE ANYONE!

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME...

HE HE...

ACT VII: KARAKURI * AMAN
"THE CURTAIN GOES DOWN"

THANK YOU...

PLIC PLOC

I CAN'T BREATHE...

GUH!!

UHM... MISTER...

IT'S STRANGE... NARUMI IS THE ONE WHO DID THE SAVING, BUT HE'S THE ONE WHO'S CRYING!

MAYBE SOME WEIRD ORIENTAL PECULIARITY ...

...THE CHANCE TO SAVE YOU ALL!

FOR GIVING ME...

WHO WAS FINALLY ABLE TO SHOW AND PROVE THE WORTH...

OF HIS STRENGTH.

THOSE ARE THE TEARS OF A MAN...

GUY... YOU HAVE MADE MUCH PROGRESS IN DESTROYING THE AUTO-MATONS...

...BUT YOU STILL HAVE MUCH TO LEARN ABOUT HUMAN NATURE.

HUH?

VRROMM

PIN PON

PIN PON

BLA BLA BLA

PIN PON

PIN PON

...COULD I HAVE COME BACK TO LIFE?

HOW...

BUT...

YOU MUST FORGET THIS TERRIBLE INCIDENT.

MISS, INSTEAD OF ANSWERS, WHAT YOU NEED FIRST AND FOREMOST IS A LOT OF REST...

SAH...

WELL...

UHM...

...NEVER!

THANK YOU, FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART...

...FOR SAVING US.

THANK YOU, MISTER...

SAY, NARUMI! YOU'RE A REAL DON JUAN!

YOU'VE ALREADY STOLEN THE HEART OF A PRETTY FRENCH GIRL!

UHM...

GRRR

NOT BAD, FOR AN ORIENTAL MONKEY WHO...

OUCH!

RRR

HA HA... IT'S NOTHING, REALLY!

LOOK, YOUR PARENTS CAME TO GET YOU!

AH! DADDY !!!

ANDREW !

EMILY! EMILY!

!

I WANNA BE LIKE YOU ONE DAY...

YOU'RE VERY STRONG, MISTER ...

TON ooo

ONE DAY...

DAAHH

PAUL! MY DARLING !!!

YOU'LL BE...

...EVEN STRONGER THAN ME!!!

TAN TAN TAN

DO YOU KNOW OF A CAPTAIN WHO GOES BY THE NAME OF GUSTAVE LINDON?

GUSTAVE?! OF COURSE! HE'S MY BOSS!

NO.

CAN I STILL NOT ASK YOU WHO YOU ARE?

ZZOOH H'H

"LIKE LONG AGO, WHEN A CERTAIN LUCILLE SAVED YOUR LIFE."

"IN FRANCE, MORE INCIDENTS ARE GOING TO HAPPEN"...

IS THAT SO? SUCH A YOUNG MAN HAS BECOME YOUR CAPTAIN?! PLEASE TELL HIM THIS...

THAT'S RIGHT! I HAD FORGOTTEN TOO! I SHOT HIM WITH MY PISTOL!

HA HA HA!

...HAD YOU FOR-GOTTEN?

YOU DAMN... DAMN SHIRO-GANES !!!

...WHO ARE YOU REALLY?

YOU .. SHIRO-GANES...

GLOUPS

OW OW OW! THAT'S RIGHT, SHE SHOT ME!!!

ZNN

VROOM

OUCH!

SHH

SAH

PLOP

ZON

YES..
IT WILL NOT ALLOW YOU TO DIE SO EASILY.

IS THAT BECAUSE OF THE AQUA VITAE?

...HUH?!
THE WOUND DISAPPEARED BY ITSELF!

...CAN FIGHT AGAINST AUTOMA-TONS.

THAT'S THE REASON WHY WE SHIRO-GANES...

AUTO-MATONS MUST...

THAT IS THE MISSION OF THE SHIRO-GANES...

...BECOME SIMPLE PUPPETS AGAIN,

AND DUST MUST RETURN... TO DUST.

TAZOMAKI

WE MUST LEAVE, GUY.

YES.

UH...

WELL...

SO, NARUMI ...

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW?

IF YOU WANT TO STOP HERE...

...WE WILL LET YOU GO.

IF YOU KEEP ACTING LIKE THIS, YOU WILL ENDANGER ALL SHIROGANES.

IF I UNDER-STAND YOU CORRECTLY, YOU DON'T INTEND TO LISTEN TO US... YOU ARE NOT EVEN PLANNING TO KEEP OUR SECRET, RIGHT?

YOU ARE QUITE THE UNORTHODOX SHIROGANE.

SO...

ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS ASK THE LIEUTEN-ANT FOR A ONE-WAY TICKET TO JAPAN.

VHH

SO?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

BUT. . WHAT WILL I DO WHEN I REACH MY LIMIT?

THE ONLY THING I'VE GOT GOING FOR ME IS MY STRENGTH.

I'VE ALWAYS WONDERED IF ONE DAY, I WOULD BE USEFUL FOR ANYTHING...

.. A QUESTION THAT'S ALWAYS BOTHERED ME.

THERE'S ...

..."WHAT GOOD IS IT TO BE STRONG?"

...MY ANSWER!

ANYWAY, THAT'S WHAT I FEEL...

TODAY, FINALLY..

I'VE FOUND...

I THINK...

SO, IF I GO WITH YOU...

...I'LL BE ABLE TO FIND MORE ANSWERS...

...TO ALL THOSE QUESTIONS I'VE BEEN ASKING MYSELF FOR SO LONG!

SO, FROM NOW ON... IF YOU WANT...

I'LL PREVENT THEM FROM SPREADING ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME.

AND THEY'LL NEVER EVER SUCK A DROP OF BLOOD FROM A KID AGAIN.

I'LL FIGHT THE AUTOMATONS .

SO I'LL GO WITH YOU...

...
"SHIROGANE"!

...YOU CAN CALL ME...

KA-BAM

SHIRO-GANE...

NARUMI, I HAD TO DO IT, YOU KNOW...

I'M SORRY! I APOLOGIZE! BUT LUCILLE HAD JUST SHOT ME!

YOU HIT ME, REMEMBER?

HUH? WHAT?

HEY, NARUMI... YOU WON'T GET AWAY WITH IT SO EASILY.

Look, I have a bruise here

HOW DARE YOU SAY THAT?!

CIRCUS

ACT VIII: KARAKURI
MACHINERY
"THE SHIROGANE
VILLAGE"

VHHH

FLAP

NO PROBLEM

WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

GUY, THERE IS SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO SHOW NARUMI.

COULD WE GO THROUGH QUIBERON, PLEASE?

ZOOH

..HUH?

THAT'S TRUE. BEFORE, MANY TOURISTS USED TO COME TO THIS TOWN...

YOU SEE, GUY? HERE, EVERY-THING HAS CHANGED ...

ZZOOH

AFTER ITS DEPARTURE ...

A CIRCUS GAVE A PER-FORMANCE IN THIS TOWN.

EIGHT YEARS AGO...

BUT . THERE'S NO ONE HERE!

WHAT?! ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME?!

ARE YOU SAYING THAT THE MEMBERS OF THAT CIRCUS...

...ARE ALL AUTOMATON'S ???

WHEREVER THEY GO, THE VIRUS ALWAYS SPREADS, AND IT IS STILL HAPPENING

YES. WHILE TRAVELING AROUND, THEY SOW THE SEEDS OF ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME.

THIS AUTOMATON CIRCUS IS INFAMOUS AMONG US SHIROGANES.

IN EVERY COUNTRY THAT THESE AUTOMATONS VISIT, THEY SPREAD THE DISEASE IN ALL DIRECTIONS AND CONSUME LARGE AMOUNTS OF HUMAN BLOOD.

THEY ARE NEMESES TO ALL SHIROGANES IN THE WORLD.

UNFORTUNATELY, WE'VE NEVER MANAGED TO ATTACK THEIR CIRCUS.

IT IS CALLED ...

THE MIDNIGHT CIRCUS!

THE MIDNIGHT... CIRCUS...

VVOOHH

SCH LAF

CLC CLC

FLAVIO-HAS-BEEN-DE-STROYED

A-NEW-SHIRO-GANE-A-BIG-MAN

CLC CLC CLC

A-BIG-SHIRO-GANE

A-BIG-SHIRO-GANE

VVHHH

HA HA HA! YOU OBVIOUSLY HAVE A BRAIN ABOVE YOUR EYES, BUT IT'S OF NO USE TO YOU.

SAY, GUY, I WANNA ASK YOU SOME-THING.

VOOH

THIS VISCOUS LIQUID THAT LOOKS LIKE MERCURY...

THIS AUTOMATON'S VITAL FLUID, IT'S THE CAUSE OF ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME, RIGHT?

SO, MAYBE DESTROYING THE AUTOMATONS ISN'T ENOUGH...

HE-UH

HE-UH

LOOK

LOOK

THAT'S GOOD, NARUMI! YOU'RE ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS!

SAH...

I PREVENTED THE KIDS FROM HAVING THEIR BLOOD SUCKED UP, BUT THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN CONTAMINATED BECAUSE OF ME...

I CUT THAT BIG FLAVIO INTO PIECES...

I'M NOT SURE, BUT... MAYBE WE SHOULD STERILIZE THEM!

THIS WATER, IN OUR BODIES TRANSFORMS INTO A KIND OF MIST...

EITHER THROUGH OUR PERSPIRATION OR THE AIR WE EXHALE, IT IS ALWAYS AROUND US.

THE AQUA VITAE THAT I DRANK AND THAT I INJECTED YOU WITH IS A PERFECT WATER THAT HEALS ALL DISEASES.

THANKS TO ITS PROPERTIES, WE CAN OVERCOME ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME.

...THE AQUA VITAE THAT PROTECTS OUR BODY BY FORMING THIS "BARRIER"...

...COMPLETELY CANCELS THE EFFECTS OF ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME THAT THE AUTOMATONS SPREAD!

THIS MIST IS THE REASON WE HAVE TO FIGHT AGAINST ALL AUTOMATONS.

HM... AND THEN?

THINK ABOUT IT! IN FACT, THIS MEANS THAT...

?

...HOW HEAVY THE RESPONSI-BILITY OF THE SHIROGANES, CARRIERS OF THE AQUA VITAE, IS!

SO YOU UNDER-STAND, NARUMI...

SOME FANCY STUFF, THIS AQUA VITAE...

THIS IMPLIES THAT FIGHTING UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL AGAINST THE AUTOMATONS SLOWLY BUT STEADILY NEUTRALIZES THE SYNDROME'S VIRUS!

HOOO! I UNDER-STAND NOW...

GRRR

RRR

STOP IT ALREADY WITH YOUR MOMMY!!!

...ALAS! DID YOU SEE, MOMMY?! I USED THIS PRECIOUS WATER FOR THIS IMBECILE!

BLANG
VLANG

VVHHH

...AND I, I AM FINALLY ALONE.

NOW... MARY AND TANIA ARE GONE...

CRAC

THE AQUA VITAE THAT LONG AGO FILLED THIS WELL...

...HAS COMPLETELY DISAPPEARED. THERE IS NOT A DROP LEFT.

BRLOM

THEN, WE VISITED OTHER PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN AFFLICTED BY ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME AND TRANSFORMED THEM INTO SHIROGANES.

TANIA, MARY AND I COLLECTED THE AQUA VITAE FROM THIS WELL.

YES... IN ORDER TO COUNTER THE PLANS OF THE AUTOMATONS, WHO CONTINUALLY INCREASE THEIR NUMBERS.

IT WAS USED TO CREATE MANY SHIROGANES, MYSELF INCLUDED.

EH?! HE DIDN'T EVEN ASK ME!

YES...

GUY... MARY ASKED YOU THAT QUESTION, DID SHE NOT?

WE ALWAYS GAVE THEM A CHOICE... BY ASKING IF THEY'D RATHER DIE, OR IF THEY'D RATHER LIVE WHILE CONSUMED BY HATRED FOR THE AUTOMATONS.

BUT WE NEVER FORCED THEM TO DRINK IT...

THAT CHOICE, I WAS ALSO ASKED TO MAKE IT...

..MORE THAN 200 YEARS AGO...

VVVHHHH-

"DO YOU WANT TO LIVE"...

"... OR..."

THAT IS WHAT "HE" ASKED ME...

YOU'RE GONNA TELL ME EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED!

OK, NOW I'VE HAD IT!!!

HM... NO...

YOU BROUGHT ME HERE TO EXPLAIN THIS TO ME... AM I WRONG?!

TELL ME CLEARLY HOW ALL OF THIS HAPPENED!

ALL THOSE WEIRD AUTOMATONS... AND YOU SHIROGANES WHO SPEND YOUR TIME MANIPULATING OTHERS... YOU DIDN'T JUST RANDOMLY APPEAR, DID YOU?!

HOWEVER ...

I AM ALMOST INFLU-ENCED BY THIS TROLL WHOSE ONLY QUALITY IS TO HAVE A BIG BODY.

IT NEVER BOTHERED ME TO THINK THAT WAY. WE SHIROGANES, ARE CONSUMED BY OUR HATRED FOR ALITOMATONS... THE REST DOESN'T MATTER. WE NEVER ASK OURSELVES USELESS QUESTIONS...

LUCILLE... WHO WERE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

UNTIL NOW, I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT MARY, TANIA AND YOU WERE THE FIRST SHIROGANES.

I THOUGHT YOU WERE THE ONLY ONES TO TEACH THE PUPPET ARTS...

ZNN

WHY DO SHIROGANES HATE ALITOMATONS SO MUCH? WHY DO THEY SACRIFICE EVERYTHING TO DESTROY THEM?!

TELL US HOW THIS ALL STARTED, LUCILLE...

I, TOO, WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE.

...EVERY PART OF THIS STORY ALWAYS BRINGS US BACK TO THE AQUA VITAE?

AND ALSO, TELL US WHY...

VVH H HHH

OVER THERE...

THERE WAS A CHURCH.

UHM...

DO YOU MEAN THAT...

IT WAS A VERY SMALL CHURCH.

BEHIND THE HILL, ON THAT SIDE.

V H H

...STOOD OUR VILLAGE.

YES.

HERE, 200 YEARS AGO...

...RIGHT AFTER THE MIDNIGHT CIRCUS CAME THROUGH.

GOOOHHHH

THE VILLAGE OF KER'LOIC ...

THIS VILLAGE WAS THE FIRST...

IT WAS NOT A VERY PROSPEROUS VILLAGE,

BUT ITS INHABITANTS WERE HARD WORKERS. THERE WAS HAPPINESS IN THIS PLACE.

VHH

...TO BE DESTROYED...

BY ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME...

FLAP FLAP

A BIG SHIRO-GANE...

... DESTROYED FLAVIO?

... ARLEQUINO!

A MAN?

I'M IN-TRIGUED ...

YOU ARE QUITE CURIOUS ...

I'M GOING TO GET A CLOSER LOOK.

LABYRINTH